OpenTheo

Revelation Introduction (Part 1) - Overview and Authorship

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this overview of the book of Revelation, Steve Gregg discusses its authorship and audience, as well as the debates and open questions surrounding it. Despite being difficult to interpret, the book is regarded as a prophetic and edifying work, offering a unique glimpse into heavenly worship and providing Christians with hymns and material for worship. Interestingly, the book of Revelation is both an epistle and a prophecy, and its style fits in with the apocalyptic genre of writing found in inter-testamental Jewish literature.

Transcript

Whenever I begin teaching through a new book, I feel the need to have an introductory lecture, or two, or three, depending on the book, and that is especially true with the book of Revelation. When you begin to study a book, it's good for you to know some background, circumstances under which it was written, who wrote it, who they were writing to, and things like that. That's true no matter what book of the Bible you're studying.

It's always good to understand those things. Some of those things are self-evident with many books. The author and the audience are often mentioned in the very first sentence of many of the epistles.

But the book of Revelation actually presents more difficulties than most, which should be handled in an introductory lecture, or two, or three. The notes that I have here are eight pages long. My students know I can use an hour and a half or two to go through half a page of notes.

But we have a limited amount of time, and we must go through the entire book of Revelation in 16 sessions. So I'm going to hasten through this introduction, but not so fast, I hope, as to make it unprofitable. The first thing I'd like to say about the book of Revelation is that it is, in a way, paradoxical in that, on one hand, it is the most difficult book of the Bible.

I think almost all commentators acknowledge this. I think most people acknowledge this, except for people who think they have it all figured out. And it was really quite easy.

They just had to read it, and they knew instantly what it was about. I meet people like this.

Some people, when they first get saved, the first book of the Bible they read is the book of Revelation.

And they interpret the rest of the Bible through the lens that they fit themselves with once they read the book of Revelation. So all the prophecies of the Bible have to fit into their idea of the book of Revelation. They get it right off.

It's all about the future, as far as they're concerned. And it's talking about nuclear war and famine and modern day events, so they think. Well, that is the first impression that many people in the modern world get.

It's not the only possible way of looking at the book of Revelation. It is perhaps the default way for most moderns, because the popular writers and speakers on the subject of Revelation typically are of one particular school. And that school does, in fact, see the book of Revelation as a history in advance of the end times.

And so they try to find things in the modern newspapers and recent events that correspond with the visions. And from time to time, you can find things like that. What they don't know is that people for 2,000 years have been finding things in their current events that they could correspond with the book of Revelation.

Just as much as today. In some cases, more than today. And this is something that we, because we are provincial, because we're products of our own age, and often are not very acquainted with people of other times and places and how they think about things, we just assume that the way everyone around us is talking about it must be the only way anyone's ever thought about it.

The fact is that this is not so. I wrote a book some years ago called Revelation Four Views, a parallel commentary. No, I don't have it for sale.

A speaker ought to have his book on a table in the back for top dollar for sale to the audience. You've got a captive audience. I can give a 90-minute infomercial for my book and sell them all.

However, I don't sell books. I don't write very many books, but no matter how many I write, I'll never sell one. I don't believe in selling things.

But I'm in the ministry. I'm not in business. But there is a book you can buy from somebody else, Amazon or someone else, called Revelation Four Views.

And by the way, it's a $32 book. I think you can get it from Amazon for $21. And if you do, I'll get $1 from it.

So buy thousands, and I will be wealthy. I wrote the book in 1997 to correct what I consider to be an imbalance in teaching on the book of Revelation in our modern time because the only view anyone seems to have ever heard, at least since the 1970s, is that Revelation is a book

about the end of the world, about a seven-year tribulation, about Antichrist, about Jesus' second coming, and so forth. And that's the only view I ever heard.

In fact, that's the only view most people have heard. Until I taught in a school where I had to teach through the book of Revelation, I had to actually study as much as I could the various options. And I discovered that the view I held was not at all the only view, nor the longest-held view, in church history.

The earlier people in church history had very well-developed schemes of interpretation of the book of Revelation that were entirely different than any I had ever heard in my youth or in the 70s and so forth. As I became aware of this, I also became aware that people in general around me were unaware of it. Friends of mine heard that I was writing a book on the four views of Revelation.

And they'd always try to speculate about what views those might be, because they'd never heard of four views. They thought, well, okay, there's pre-trib, there's mid-trib, and there's post-trib, but that's only three. And, of course, those of you who now know what the four views of Revelation are know that all three of those are one view.

All three of those are variations on what's called the futurist view. Others said, well, okay, four views. There's the amillennial view, the premillennial view, and the postmillennial view.

But those aren't actually different views of Revelation. Those are different views of the Bible as a whole, and particularly one chapter in Revelation, chapter 20. You never encounter the millennium in the Bible until you get almost to the last chapter in the whole Bible.

It's not the exact last. It's chapter 20 out of 22 in the book. You get through 65 books of the Bible without any mention of the book of the thousand-year reign of Christ.

Not anywhere in the first 65 books. You get to the 66th book, and you get through 20 or 19 of its 22 chapters before you hear about it. By the time you get to chapter 20, you've got one chapter that mentions, the only chapter in the Bible that mentions the millennium.

Obviously, one's view of the millennium is not exactly the same thing as their view of the book of Revelation. It's their view of one chapter of the book of Revelation, and that's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about millennial views.

We're not talking about rapture views. The four views of Revelation are much different, much more different from one another than any of those views are. That's what we're going to be looking at here.

But this is one of the difficulties of the book of Revelation. It's full of difficulties. One of them is, of course, what in the world is it talking about? How is it to be approached? But there's other difficulties of a more, shall we say, less sensational sort.

Like, who's the author? Now, you might say, well, that's obvious. It's John who wrote the book of Revelation. It even says so.

True, it does. Four or five times it says, I, John. The writer's name is John.

The question is, which John? The early church did not all have the same opinion about this. Well, the earliest Christians did. For the first two or three centuries, it seems that almost all the Christians believed that it was the apostle John who wrote it.

But the man didn't call himself the apostle John. When Peter or Paul wrote, they said, Paul, an apostle. Peter, an apostle.

John doesn't say John, the apostle, he just says, I, John, without any further embellishment or identifying remarks. And there were some, at least in the third century, who suggested that it was a different John, not the apostle, who wrote the book. And I'll tell you later why.

But it remains a substantial controversy. Scholars are not all agreed that the apostle John wrote it. And I say, well, I don't care about that kind of menial stuff.

Who wrote the book? Well, I do, because it's in the Bible. And it's not just a matter of curiosity. Not every book that was written by a Christian belongs in my Bible.

Not everything that Christians write is the word of God. Christians have written hundreds of books, thousands of books, maybe hundreds of thousands of books through the years. They're great books in many cases, but they don't belong in the Bible.

Why? They're not written by an apostle of Jesus Christ. That's why. They're not the word of God.

Jesus ordained his apostles and authorized them to speak as him, as his agents. He said, he that receives him that I send, receives me. An apostle is a sent one, and to receive an apostle is like receiving Jesus himself.

To receive a teacher, like me for example, is not the same thing as receiving Jesus. In other words, you can reject everything I say and still be loyal to Jesus. You can just say, I think Steve doesn't have it right, but I'm still following Jesus.

But you can't say the apostles didn't have it right and still be following Jesus, because Jesus authorized them as his spokesmen. Whom to receive is to receive him. Whom to reject is to reject him.

Now, if a book is written by an apostle, it's as good as it was written by Jesus. If it's not written by an apostle, it might be as good as if I'd written it. It doesn't belong in the Bible.

So, the apostolic authorship is contested, but it's very important. And by the way, the book of Revelation has also difficulties with reference to its inclusion in the canon of Scripture, because of this very thing. The book of Revelation was the last book for the Christian church to accept

into the New Testament.

And it was very late. Although there were Christians from the very beginning, when it was written in the first century, there were immediately churches that accepted it as an authoritative word from an apostle. There were many churches that did not.

They thought it was a different author, perhaps. And, therefore, it was not included in the canon of Scripture until as late as 396 A.D., almost 400 years into the Christian era, before the church as a whole accepted that Revelation belongs to the canon of the New Testament. If you had been born in 350 A.D., you would not have the book of Revelation in the New Testament.

It was around, and there were people who accepted it, but there were people who didn't, who were church leaders. But it was in the late 4th century that it was finally accepted as genuinely a scriptural book that needed to be included. So, it had problems with reference to establishing its authorship, problems with reference to its inclusion in the canon, problems with reference to its date and historical setting.

Now, with many books of the Bible, it doesn't matter when they were written that much. It could be 20 years earlier or later, and it wouldn't make much difference. The content is all the same.

But, with Revelation, there are some factors that make it very important to know when it was written. Because one of the four views of Revelation is that John was writing about things that were about to happen, and which did, in fact, happen shortly after he wrote it. That view is called the Preterist view.

So, now you know about the Futurist view, the one that says it's all about the future. The Preterist view actually says it's basically about the past, things that happened shortly after John's time. They were genuine prophecies at the time he wrote them, but they have subsequently been fulfilled, and we do not look forward to a later fulfillment than John's own day or shortly thereafter.

Most who hold that view believe that it was written prior to A.D. 70. A.D. 70 is when Jerusalem was invaded by the Romans, and the temple was destroyed permanently. And it has not stood since.

It was the end of the Jewish order. And many people, the Preterists, believe that the book of Revelation is predictive of that event. Well, obviously, if the book of Revelation predicts A.D. 70, that tells us something about the date of its writing.

It must have been written before that. But there's a problem. Most scholars today believe that Revelation was written after that.

The most commonly given date for the writing of Revelation in modern commentaries and study Bibles is about 96 A.D. But if so, that's a quarter of a century after the fall of Jerusalem.

And therefore, if that is in fact the date of writing, then it cannot possibly be predicting an event that happened 25 years earlier than it was written. It might be written as a forgery, pretending to have been written in advance.

Some books are written that way. But if Revelation was written that way, it needs to be excised from the Bible as a forgery and as a fake. Now, you might say, well, I don't have any commitment to it being about the fall of Jerusalem, so I don't care about the date.

True. If it's not about that, the date could be anything, and it would make much difference. For example, if the book of Revelation is describing the end of the world, it wouldn't matter whether it was written in 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, or 100 A.D. It's still writing about things way off in the future.

In fact, all four of the views, or three of the four, would be unaffected by the date of writing. But the reason that the date of writing is important is because the one view that is affected by it is otherwise a very well-attested view. A view that has much in its favor, but is vulnerable on this point of the date of writing.

Because if the book of Revelation was written in the reign of Domitian in the 90s A.D., then of course the Preterist view is not even worthy of consideration. However, there have always been top-rank scholars, and there still are, who believe the book of Revelation was written in the reign of Nero. Nero died, committed suicide, in 68 A.D. And if the book was written during his reign, it was written, therefore, before 70 A.D. And then all the other indicators that might support that identification of its fulfillment are supported.

Especially in view of the fact that John repeatedly said these are things that must shortly take place. His original readers probably thought that meant something. So, you've got those two views we've just, in passing, have mentioned.

The Futurist view and the Preterist view. There are two others, and we will come to them later. But the date of writing is a significant one, issue, to solve in the case of interpreting Revelation, more than in the case of most other books of the Bible.

Thus, its historical setting is open to question. Was it the persecution during Nero's time? Was it the persecution during Domitian's time? Was it another period of time, and a different set of circumstances? Was there an imperial persecution, or was there just localized persecution? These things are questions that scholars don't all agree about. Though we can get some idea as we study it, we may not be able to be sure.

These remain problematic questions. There's also problems with reference to its relationship to the other books attributed to John. Now, Paul wrote 12 or 13 epistles.

There's always been some question about the authorship of Hebrews. Therefore, the exact number of epistles Paul wrote is not known, but certainly the vast majority of them are easy to identify as his own. They have his name on them.

John wrote, we believe, five books. The Gospel of John, three epistles that bear his name in our Bible, and the book of Revelation. The problem is, there are many scholars, and there have been from very early times, who have felt that whoever wrote the book of Revelation could not have been the same man who wrote the Gospel of John and the epistles of John.

This has to do primarily with the style of the Greek, which is not a small matter. The style is extremely different, so much so that the other books attributed to John are said to be written in some of the most polished Greek in the New Testament. Whereas the book of Revelation is not only the most unpolished Greek in the New Testament, but it's almost the most unliterary document that's come down to us from the ancient world.

It's got bad grammar in the Greek. It's got incomplete sentences. It's got all kinds of issues.

Many have said, well, the guy who wrote Revelation doesn't even speak Greek well. He couldn't be the same guy who wrote John and the epistles of John. So that's been a problem.

Now, my contention is it is the same man, and we'll have to discuss that later. But that's one of the problems that have attended the study of this book from the earliest times. So these are the issues.

The book of Revelation provides us with a much larger plethora of problems to solve. Just going in, even before we start talking about what the symbols are talking about, the visions, what they mean, just talking about the book as an existing document is full of various problems that don't attach to most of the books of the Bible. But on the other hand, it's a blessed book to read, problematic as it is.

And this is why I say it's paradoxical. On one hand, extremely problematic. On the other, an extreme blessing.

And there's a few things that make it so. One thing, the book itself claims to be so. It's the only book in the Bible that actually says, blessed is the man who actually reads this book.

A blessing is pronounced on the reader and those who keep the words of the book. In chapter 1 and verse 3. Furthermore, it is a prophecy. It's the only book of the New Testament that is actually a prophetic book.

Now some of the other New Testament books contain prophecies. For example, the Gospels contain some prophecies that Jesus uttered. But they're not books of prophecy.

They're books of history, telling the story of Jesus, which happen to contain, incidentally, some prophecy. Likewise, the Epistles are not books of prophecy. They are occasional documents written to address matters going on in certain churches.

Once in a while, there's a prophetic sort of statement in them. But they're not books of prophecy. The book of Revelation is a book of prophecy.

In fact, it calls itself a book of prophecy. It's the only New Testament book that is identified as a prophetic book. Now many books in the Old Testament are prophetic.

But Revelation alone in the New Testament is. And by the way, prophecy, according to the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14, 3, Paul said that the prophet, he who prophesies, speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. This book fills that bill.

The book of Revelation exhorts, it edifies, and there's comfort in it. Although many people find it very uncomforting. Many people find it very troubling.

That, I think, comes from, again, popular teaching on the book rather than the book itself. And therefore, we'll have to look at the book through some various lenses other than just the popular one. You'll find it is a book of comfort.

It's a book of edification. It's a book of exhortation. It is a prophecy.

And therefore, it edifies. It's a blessing. It promises a blessing.

And one of the things that's such an edifying thing in the book of Revelation is that it's the only book in the Bible that actually transports us from time to time into heaven to see the worship of God taking place around the throne by beings that have no sin in them. By beings whose worship is as perfect as it gets. We have in David's Psalms, in the Old Testament, samples of Israeli worship.

They are very excellent and provide the songbook not only for the Jews but for Christians. And, in fact, some of the songs we sing tonight are from the Psalms. Some we may sing in the future are from Revelation.

Some say Revelation is the New Testament songbook as Psalms is the Old Testament. But the difference is David and some of the writers of the Psalms didn't always have a good attitude. They were not perfected men in heaven uttering perfect praise.

They were men sometimes ventilating their doubts, their anger, their hostility, wishing for other people's babies be dashed against stones and so forth. Things that, while as we study those Psalms, we can see why they felt that way. And they might even seem justified.

But it's hardly the same kind of worship you find in heaven. In Revelation, we read such specimens of heavenly worship that it has provided for the church throughout history as the Psalms have material for hymns and material for worship for the church because it just doesn't get any better than what we find in the book. So the book, with all of its problems, is nonetheless worthwhile.

More than worthwhile, it's a blessing. It's a unique book. It is, I believe, and most commentators agree, the most difficult book in the Bible.

But in some respects, it could be the one that promises and delivers the most blessing in some

respects. Perhaps not as much as some other books in terms of practical instruction, though there's some of that there too. There is a lot of theology in the book.

It has, in fact, the most exalted view of Christ of any other book in the New Testament, with the possible exception of the other books of John. John exalts Christ as God more clearly in his writings than do other writers. Paul does sometimes.

Peter does seemingly one time in his writings. But John does frequently. In fact, our doctrine of the deity of Christ, that is, the view that Christ is in fact God, not just some exalted creation of God, our doctrine of the deity of Christ is supported by more texts from the writings of John than from probably other New Testament books combined.

Because it is John that emphasizes this, and the book of Revelation emphasizes it. We have the highest Christology, as a scholar would call it. Our view of Christ is more exalted in the book of Revelation than anywhere else.

He is equated unashamedly with the Alpha and the Omega, with Yahweh, with God. And so the book of Revelation certainly carries much profit in it. And it is a good thing, in my opinion, that it passed the final tests to be included in the canon of Scripture, and that we have it today.

Now, the book is unique in its genre. The name of the book of Revelation in the Greek Bible is the Apocalypse. The actual Greek word is Apokalypsis, but when you anglicize that word, it's Apokalypsis.

And so, for example, in the Catholic Bible, the name of the book is the Apocalypse. If you've ever been a Catholic, or ever read a Catholic Bible, you find the final book is not called Revelation, it's called the Apocalypse. That's the Greek name.

The word Apokalypsis means the unveiling. It comes from two Greek particles. Apa means away from, and kalypsis is the Greek word for covering.

And so, away from, taking the covering away, is what Apokalypsis means. It means like removing the veil and showing something that has been there already, but has been concealed until this moment. The name of the book is actually the Apokalypsis, or the unveiling of Jesus Christ.

The name in our English Bible says the Apocalypse of John, or of Saint John the Beloved, or something like that. But that title is not actually in the oldest manuscripts. The titles are added, actually, of our books later on by editors.

But in the book itself, its title is its first line, the Apocalypse, the unveiling of Jesus Christ. And it fills three literary genres. Most books in the Bible only fill one genre, or maybe two.

This one has three. First of all, not in order that your notes give. I apologize, I reserve the right to change my notes on the fly.

First of all, it is an epistle. Now, it's certainly not the only example of an epistle in our Bible. There are many epistles.

In fact, all the books of our New Testament are epistles, with the exception of three. Of the 27 New Testament books, 24 are epistles, or at least writings addressed to somebody, like letters or something that's a personal correspondence. Of course, the ones that are the exceptions are Matthew and Mark and the Gospel of John.

But the book of Luke and the book of Acts are written to a man named Theophilus. The rest of the books of the Bible are epistles that are, of the New Testament, are epistles addressed to churches or individuals. The book of Revelation is really no different than others in that respect.

If you'll look at Revelation chapter 1, for example, and verse 4, it begins, John, to the seven churches which are in Asia. Well, that's exactly how epistles begin, isn't it? The author identifies himself and mentions who his audience is. Paul does that, Peter does that, James does that.

All the epistle writers, unless they are anonymous, open with the same kind of structure. The author names himself and names his audience. A little later on, he is told by Jesus Christ to take down a letter and send it to the seven churches, which are in Asia.

So this is a letter that was sent to seven churches. Now, they are called the seven churches in Asia. To us, Asia means a big continent over there just to the east of Europe.

In biblical times, Asia was the name of a Roman province. The Romans had conquered most of the Mediterranean world and they gave names to different provinces. The portion of land that we today would call Turkey was the Roman province of Asia Minor, or simply Asia.

The seven churches named in this book are all in that region. They are all in what is today Turkey. And that is what is meant by Asia in the book, because that is the Roman province by that name.

Now, the book was sent to the seven churches just like Paul's letters were sent to churches. If you look at the end of the book of Revelation, chapter 22, verse 21, the last line in the book of Revelation is, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Now I would just give you an assignment on your own time. We don't have time right now, but look at random at the closing words of any of Paul's epistles. You will find Paul's epistles end with, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Or some slightly modified version of the same. The epistles begin and end as this book begins and ends. It is an epistle.

It is an epistle to certain people. In that respect, it is like other books of the New Testament. And that is helpful to know, because many times we don't think of it that way.

We think of it as a book almost like a science fiction novel to intrigue us about the end of the

world. No, it is a letter written to some people about their situation, just like all the epistles are. Whenever you study a biblical epistle, you should find out something about who the people are who are receiving it, what their circumstances were, because all the epistles were written primarily to an original audience, not to us.

When you read the epistles of the Bible, you should realize you are reading somebody else's mail. Now, it is okay, because it has been published. You can't be arrested.

But you are reading a conversation that took place 2,000 years ago, in many cases, between one party and another set of parties, usually an apostle and some group of Christians. That is why there are so many things in the epistles that are obscure to us, because Paul or Peter will allude to something that his readers know about, because he is writing to them about things they know about, things that are actually going on in their church, actually mentioning people that we don't know, mentioning names. Tell Euodias and Syntyche to stop fighting with each other.

Well, who are they? The Philippians knew. I don't. It was written to them, not to me.

When Paul says to Timothy, when you come, try to come before winter and bring the cloak I left behind, and the books and the parchments, too. Is that written to me? Am I supposed to find out where Paul is and find out where his cloak is and get it to him before next winter? Obviously, it is clear that epistles are written in situations to people, real-life situations, and they are directed to them where they are. But also, the reason that these epistles are in our Bible is because they are so full of universal theology and ethics and so forth, such as all Christians can benefit from, that we benefit from reading what Paul said to the Corinthians about church orderliness, or what Paul said to Timothy about appointing elders in the church, or what Paul said to Thessalonians about people working instead of sitting around on their hands and expecting people to provide for them.

In other words, there are situations in the original churches that these epistles were written to that are fairly universal, that correspond to situations in churches that we actually go to. And, of course, Paul's solutions, Paul's answers, Paul's exhortations about these things clearly reveal the mind of God about such things. And when we see such things in our churches, we read the epistles and we apply them.

We see there are transferable truths. When you read an epistle, you're not reading a letter written to you in the Bible. You're reading a letter written to somebody you don't know.

You'll know them someday if you persevere, and if they did. But they're not you, they're not your friends, they're not anybody you know. They aren't living in America.

They're not living in the 21st century. They had their own situation in life that was the milieu into which the epistle was written. And it's as you learn something about what it meant to them, then you learn how to transfer the truths to your own situation.

That's what we do. That's what we do with epistles. That's the only reasonable way to study epistles.

And that's what all Christian scholars and Christian pastors do. I mean, you realize first of all, the original audience had a stake in this. It was about and to them.

It secondarily can apply to anyone else who's in similar circumstances, and that's the benefit we get from it. True of Revelation also, and this is something we don't usually think about Revelation. We think Revelation is written to us living in the 21st century, about us in our time.

There's no indication that this is so. This is an epistle written to seven churches that were alive at the time, and John said to them at least five times, these things I'm talking about are soon going to happen. These are about to take place.

The time is near. Now, those words would mean something to the original audience. We can't forget them when we read the book of Revelation.

They existed, and they were the people John had in mind when he wrote this, and that Jesus had in mind when he sent it to them. True, things that are said there may have broader application. Certainly when you read the seven letters to the seven churches in chapters two and three, you're reading like regular epistles to churches with problems and solutions being offered to those problems.

You'll find all those seven churches today. Some churches are like the church of Smyrna. Some are like the church of Laodicea.

Some are like the church of Ephesus. Some are like the church of Pergamon. The messages to the churches have transferable truths to modern times, but the letters had an original audience, and the book as a whole was directed to their concerns.

Now, that's an important omission in the teaching of many on the book of Revelation. We're talking about a real epistle to real people. It's an epistle, first of all, like most of the books of the New Testament are.

But unlike most of the books of the New Testament, it is a prophecy also. It says in Revelation 1.3, Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy. There is no other book of the New Testament, epistle or otherwise, that is a book of prophecy.

Therefore, although it is like other books in the New Testament in being an epistle, it is unlike them in being a prophecy. Now, what is a prophecy? Well, we said, it's he who prophesies, speaks to edification, exhortation, comfort to men. What is the content of prophecy? Well, a couple of things primarily.

And this is true whether it's Old Testament or New Testament prophecy. There are, after all, some very clear similarities between Revelation and certain Old Testament prophetic books like

Daniel and Ezekiel and Zechariah. Not much difference between New Testament prophecy and Old Testament prophecy, apparently.

The only book of New Testament prophecy we have in our Bible would fit very well into the canon of Old Testament prophets, except that it talks about Jesus and they don't in quite so particular terms. They do in other terms. But prophecies, no matter what book of prophecy you read, you're going to read two elements in prophecy.

One is the forth telling or the preaching, the proclaiming of God's message to the original recipients. And that would be more like preaching than anything else. It would be saying, here's what God wants you to know.

Here's what you're doing wrong. Here's what you need to repent of. Here's what God promises you if you turn and repent.

This is what the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, all the minor prophets, they all have these elements. They tell like a sermon. Here's what God wants you to do.

Here's what he's upset about. Here's what you need to repent of. It's like a sermon.

Revelation has that, especially in the first three chapters. The seven letters to the seven churches in chapters two and three are that. They're like forth telling, a prophetic oracle to the churches.

But prophets also predict things. In the Old Testament prophets, this element of prediction is somewhat less pronounced, believe it or not. We know of hundreds of Old Testament predictions, and there are hundreds.

But there are thousands of verses in the Old Testament prophets that don't predict anything at all. In the Old Testament the prophets are mostly preachers who sometimes predict things. The book of Revelation, it's kind of balanced the other way.

Mostly predictive. Mostly talking about future events from the author's point of view. And a little bit of, a couple chapters there of preaching.

But both elements are present in the book of Revelation as they are in all the books of prophecy. In that respect, Revelation fits more neatly into the canon of the Old Testament prophets than the New Testament in its style. But it's an epistle that makes it like other New Testament books.

It's a prophecy which makes it unlike other New Testament books, and like quite a few Old Testament books. Then it wears a third hat. It is also what we call an apocalypse.

I already mentioned the word apocalypse. It means unveiling. There is a word that Christian teachers and preachers and scholars use that you may wish to know.

It's the word apocalyptic. It should be obvious it comes from the word apocalypse. But what is the relationship of the word apocalyptic to the word apocalypse? There's a whole genre of literature that modern biblical scholars recognize that were written in the intertestamental period.

In the centuries prior to the birth of Jesus, but after the Old Testament closed. You may not be aware there was 400 years between the close of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi, and the coming of John the Baptist at the beginning of the New Testament. There's a 400 year gap.

That's called the intertestamental period. In the latter half of that period, the last 200 years before Christ came, there were many, many books written by Jewish writers, which modern scholars have discovered and they have called them apocalyptic literature. It's an actual genre or style of writing.

The reason it is called apocalyptic is because it resembles the book of Revelation in its style. Now, it's kind of an anachronism to call it apocalyptic because they only gave it that name after they knew about the book of Revelation, which is called the Apocalypse. And because these earlier books written before Revelation have been found more recently, they simply refer to them as apocalyptic.

It is like the book of Revelation, though really the book of Revelation is like them. They were written sometimes a couple hundred years before the book of Revelation. Apocalyptic literature was extremely popular among the Jews and the early Christians.

Many of the New Testament, well, the books that were excluded from the New Testament canon, but were considered for it. Christian books written in the first century and the early second were apocalyptic in style. This was like a genre, like today, science fiction would be a genre of literature.

Or children's fairy tales would be a genre, a different kind of genre of literature. Rap would be a certain genre of music. Apocalyptic was a certain genre of religious writing among the Jews for about 200 years prior to the writing of the book of Revelation and for about 100 years after.

So it was written in the midst of a time when the style in which it is written was very popular, though Christians didn't know about this style very much in modern times until quite a collection of ancient apocalyptic books written shortly before the Christian era were discovered in the 1940s. And this led scholars to realize, oh, the book of Revelation isn't as unique as we thought. We once thought that its closest affinity was to books like Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, which also contained the same style.

They would also have what we call apocalyptic style in them. But actually, Revelation is closer in affinity to these apocalyptic works, which probably, since they were not inspired, by the way, the Jewish apocalyptic works were not inspired. They're just popular Jewish writing.

Just like C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia, they're not inspired, but they're edifying Christian

reading. Christians read them profitably, but they don't want to put them in the Bible because Lewis was not an inspired prophet or apostle, nor did he claim to be. And nor did the writers of these apocalyptic books claim to be prophets.

They were just writers with something they wanted to say. And the popular way of saying it was in apocalyptic genre. This style is writing things usually about earthly events, but written as though they're not earthly events, like almost in fairy tale style, dragons and monsters and wars in the sky, and things like that are the stuff of apocalyptic literature in general.

In apocalyptic literature, generally speaking, an angel appears to an author and guides him around, shows him things, interprets them for him, as you know also happens in Daniel and the Book of Revelation. The only difference is in the popular apocalypses of the intertestamental period, there were no real angels doing that. That was just the author's style.

A little bit like when John Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress, it begins, I dreamed, and I saw a man with a burden on his back. And then he tells the story. How many of you have read Pilgrim's Progress? If you've read Pilgrim's Progress, then you're better equipped to understand how apocalyptic literature works.

It claims to be seen, John Bunyan didn't really have that dream. At least I don't think he did. He was in prison, and he could have had the dream, but he sure had a great memory if he dreamed all those things and remembered them to write them down, because the book's thick like this.

I think he simply wrote it as a piece of edifying fiction and framed it in the imagery of being a dream that he had. C.S. Lewis did the same thing when he wrote The Great Divorce. It's a popular thing to do.

Also, the apocalyptic writers, not John, but the apocalyptic writers that were previous to him, wrote their religious fiction using the claim that angels had come to them and shown them things and so forth. Now, the other apocalyptic literature has given us a real assistance in helping to make sense of the book of Revelation. Because, of course, the book of Revelation, what kind of a book is it? It's a different book than any other we read anywhere, unless you've read apocalyptic literature, in which case it's a lot like books you've read before.

The early readers had read a lot of apocalyptic literature. It was the most popular genre of religious fiction that was being circulated in their day. Therefore, God inspired a book using that genre, and it communicated its message in the same manner as did the other apocalyptic books.

The difference was, this was God's message revealed by real angels to a real apostle. And that makes it different than the others, but in other respects, the style and the means of communication is the same. Now, in the providence of God, we have preserved for us a sample of apocalyptic literature written before the time of Christ, which is easy for us to interpret

because it is an apocalyptic prologue and an apocalyptic epilogue attached to the prosaic book of Esther.

Now, the book of Esther is about as prosaic as any book in the Bible. It doesn't even mention God. It's just telling a very interesting story where the providence of God is so visible that you're not even aware that God isn't mentioned.

You read the book of Esther and you say, you've seen God through the whole book, but he's never been mentioned because the providence of God is so striking through the book of Esther. But at least the story is told in a historically literal way, so we know exactly what happened. But years after Esther's time, in the time when apocalyptic literature was popular, some unknown writer claiming to be Mordecai, now, Mordecai, of course, was one of the main characters in the book of Esther, Esther's cousin or uncle, a hero in the book.

Esther's the real hero in the book, but Mordecai's like the second hero in the book. An author who claimed to be Mordecai but wasn't, who was living hundreds of years after Mordecai's time, wrote an apocalyptic prologue to the book of Esther and an apocalyptic epilogue in the style that was popular in his time, which was apocalyptic style. The interesting thing, though, is that he claimed that what he wrote was a dream and that when the story transpired, he realized how the dream had been fulfilled.

In other words, the story of Esther, as we have it from God, is the story that is summarized in these apocalyptic sections. But you wouldn't know it. This is so helpful because we can read these apocalyptic sections and say, that sounds like the book of Revelation, but it isn't.

It's the book of Esther. Let me read them for you. They're in your notes.

Page two of your notes, near the top. This anonymous author claiming to be Mordecai wrote this. By the way, these sections are still found in the Catholic Bible because they're part of the Apocrypha.

The Catholic Bible includes this prologue and the epilogue attached to the book of Esther, though they were not originally part of the book of Esther and were written centuries later. At the beginning, the anonymous author claiming to be Mordecai says, Behold, noise and confusion, thunders and earthquake, tumult upon the earth. And behold, two great dragons came forward, both ready to fight, and they roared terribly.

And at their roaring, every nation prepared for war to fight against the nation of the righteous. And behold, a day of darkness and gloom and tribulation and distress, affliction and great tumult upon the earth. And the whole righteous nation was troubled.

They feared the evils that threatened them, and they were ready to perish. Then they cried to God, and from their cry, as though from a tiny spring, there came a great river with abundant water. Light came, and the sun rose, and the lowly were exalted and consumed those who held in honor.

Now, although it doesn't sound exactly like any particular passage in the book of Revelation, it looks like a passage that could easily fit in the book of Revelation. If you read it there, you wouldn't stop to think, Boy, that's different. Because it isn't.

It's very much the same. It's very much the same kind of writing that Revelation is. Dragons, rivers, light, world wars, earthquakes, it's all there.

However, then follows the book of Esther, and at the end of the canonical book of Esther, we have the same hand writing an epilogue, and we have that here too. He says, I remember the dream that I had concerning these matters, and none of them has failed to be fulfilled. The tiny stream, which became a river, and there was light and the sun and abundant water, the river is Esther, whom the king married and made queen.

The two dragons are Haman and myself. The nations are those gathered to destroy the name of the Jews, and my nation, this is Israel, who cried out to God and were saved. In other words, he says, that whole prologue was simply a summary of the book of Esther, but didn't sound very much like the book of Esther.

It sounded like the end of the world. But you see, the value of these particular specimens of apocalyptic writing is that we can compare them with the actual prosaic story and say, oh, okay, so a woman is used in such and such a way in the providence of God to spare her nation, and an apocalyptic writer writes about dragons fighting each other and a river filling the earth and earthquakes and tumult, and tribulation is mentioned. In other words, all the stock in trade of apocalyptic writing is here because it's a sample of it.

But we can see that it's not talking about dragons and world wars and earthquakes and rivers. It's talking about a rather interesting romantic story, which, although it has great evidences of God's providence taking place, it really is a very earthly story itself, and one which you might read in a history book rather than in science fiction. It's not about outer space, for example, or the end of the world.

Now, the book of Revelation clearly is written in this style, which raises questions. What do these same images in the book of Revelation represent, and images of the same sort? Do they possibly represent things that are really quite earthly, normal kinds of events, but described in this fantastic manner? It is certainly something we need to consider. It's something we would not know if we were not familiar with apocalyptic literature, and certainly most people are not.

Most Christians are not. But there's plenty of samples of it now to read, so it's not necessary to be unfamiliar with it now. And the early readers were not unfamiliar with it.

They knew it very well and would have approached the book as a piece of apocalyptic writing, and therefore would have had a different set of presuppositions about it than we might in the 21st century coming to it raw, cold, not prepared, unfamiliar, and they'd reach different conclusions, of course. So the book of Revelation is three genres, epistolatory, prophetic, and

apocalyptic. By the way, there are apocalyptic passages in some of the canonical books like Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and also in Jesus' Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24, but for the most part, most of the scripture is not written in apocalyptic style, but Revelation in its entirety is.

Okay. Now, most apocalypses that have been found are different from the Revelation in a number of ways. One, Revelation claims to be an inspired prophecy.

The others don't. The other apocalypses lie about who wrote them. For example, the apocalypses have names like, you know, the testimony of the 12 patriarchs, the book of Enoch, the book of Baruch.

Baruch was Jeremiah's scribe. None of these books were written by those men, but they claim to be. The book of Enoch was not written by Enoch.

The book of Baruch was not written by Baruch. The book of the 12 patriarchs was not written by any of the 12 patriarchs. It was the common practice in the intertestamental period for those who wrote apocalyptic literature in order to give their books a sense of authority to lie about who their author was.

They're all anonymously written. No one knows who really wrote them, but they claim to be famous people who had lived centuries earlier than themselves. In that respect, Revelation is different from other apocalypses.

The writer doesn't do that. He doesn't claim to be anyone famous. He might be the apostle John, but he doesn't say, so he just calls himself John.

He doesn't claim to be anyone famous from another generation previous or centuries earlier. If he isn't really John, then he's lying about who he is. But if he was lying about who he was, he'd probably say John the apostle or John the son of Zebedee or John the son of Thunder or something like that to try to pretend to be an apostle.

The author doesn't claim to be an apostle. He just says, I, John, and assumes that his readers know him. He's familiar to his readers, and that's his real name.

So it's different than apocalypses of another sort in that way. Also, the book of Revelation makes an appeal to the readers to repent. The other apocalypses sort of paint the Jews out to be the righteous people persecuted by the evil people and does not call the people of God to repent, but rather encourages them that God's on their side.

The book of Revelation, at least five of the seven churches are told they better repent or they're in a heap of trouble with God. So it's a book calling for repentance. It's rebuking even the church.

It's written by the man who claims to have written it, whoever he might have been. I'm

convinced he's the apostle John, and we will show why in due time. Now, let's do so now, as a matter of fact.

Let's talk about the authorship of the book. Very important. In five places, the author simply calls himself John.

He does not elaborate. There were certainly more than one Christian named John in the first century. In fact, there might have been thousands of Christians named John, although John might not have been as popular a name in first century Israel as it is in modern America, where John is an extremely common name.

But there are other Johns that are known to us. In fact, Peter, the apostle's father's name was John. John is the Greek form of Jonah.

And Jesus referred to Peter as son of Jonah or son of John. And the apostle John, of course, was John. There's also a known man who was an elder, a presbyter, of the church of Ephesus, whose name was John.

We know very little about him. What we do know about him comes from a quote from a church father named Papias. Papias was a very knowledgeable man at the end of the first century who had known some people who had known the apostles.

He wrote six books. All of them are gone. We don't have any of them.

But we know some of the passages from his books because while they were still around, a church historian named Eusebius in 325 quoted from Papias somewhat. So although we've lost Papias' actual work, we have fragments of his work preserved in the writings of Eusebius, the earliest church historian that we know of besides Luke. And in one of the quotations of Papias in Eusebius' work, which I've given you at the bottom of page two, Papias said, Now, we don't know who Aristion was, but he and John are said to be presbyters, disciples of the Lord, but not apostles.

This John is mentioned separately from the apostle John because obviously in the line above that, he talks about Thomas, James, John, Matthew, and the other disciples. Obviously, there's more than one John here. But in the third century, Papias was conversant with people who had known these people.

He lived in that transitional generation after the death of the apostles where there were still quite a few living witnesses to what had been said. He said, Whenever I ran into these people, I wanted to know what the apostles and others had said. I wanted to know what the Aristion had said, too, and the presbyter John.

Well, who is the presbyter John? We don't know. But in the third century, there are two tombs, Christian tombs from the first century in Ephesus that have the name John on them. And assume that one of them was the apostle John who died in Ephesus according to tradition, and

the other perhaps this presbyter John in Ephesus.

Now, there's really no reason to ascribe the book of Revelation to this presbyter John, except for the difficulties in ascribing it to the same author as the man who wrote the Gospels and the Epistles. That is, the Gospel of John and the three Epistles of John. They all are very much alike in style and in content and in emphasis.

Anyone who's read the Gospel of John and has become acquainted with its language and then moves to the Epistles of John, it feels very much like they're reading the writings of the same man. But when you come to Revelation, it's not so clear. And if you're reading it in Greek, it's almost clear that it's not the same man.

As I said, the other writings attributed to John are among the most polished Greek. Now, not all the New Testament is written in good Greek. Paul, for example, did not write very well in Greek.

His grammar, his diction wasn't perfect. And scholars don't consider Paul to be a very good Greek writer in terms of his literary style. On the other hand, Luke was excellent.

John was excellent. Whoever wrote the book of Hebrews was excellent. Some of the books were written in very superior Greek and some not so much.

The books of John, other than Revelation, are among the very best, written by somebody who knew Greek very, very well. But by contrast, the writer of the Revelation did not seem to know Greek very well. And this is acknowledged by conservative evangelical scholars everywhere.

J. H. Moulton, for example, said of Revelation, its grammar is perpetually stumbling. Its idiom is that of a foreign language, as the author didn't speak Greek as a native language. Its whole style is that of a writer who neither knows nor cares for literary form.

Not very flattering. But a little more flattering than the next quote, which comes from Earl Rademacher, who said, the book of Revelation is the most uncultured literary production that has come down to us from antiquity. Now, whether this is hyperbole or whether this is exactly true, it's a clear contrast with the cultured Greek of the other writings that are attributed to the same author.

And from very early times, at least the third century, there have been people who denied that the apostle could have written Revelation for this reason pretty much alone. One other reason was sometimes given, and that's that they believed that the book of Revelation taught a future millennium. The earliest Christians did not believe that.

They didn't believe that doctrine. But they said the Gnostics were the first to teach that. And so some of the early church fathers thought, for example, Eusebius, the church historian, thought that it was Serentis, the Gnostic heretic, who wrote Revelation.

Not a good theory, in my opinion, since the author's name was John. But the point is, there was

some theological concern, because most Christians did not believe in a future millennium, and reading Revelation 20 sounded like the writer did. And that was, in the earliest days, a doctrine associated with the Gnostics, not with the Christians.

But they got over it. Many Christians came to adopt the premillennial view, and of course a great number of them adopt it today. But it was mainly the Greek style that was the hang-up.

And there were some who just couldn't get over it. There are modern commentators who say, we don't know who wrote the book of Revelation, but one thing we know absolutely sure, it's not the same person who wrote those other books of John. And they say it based entirely on the tremendous difference in grammar.

However, those are not insuperable obstacles. Now, that's coming from me, a person who doesn't read Greek. The guys who are the real Greek scholars, they say, it can't be the same guy.

Here's a guy who can't read a line of Greek, and I'm saying, that's not a problem. But there's a reason I'm saying it. Because you don't have to know much Greek in order to see ways in which the problem can be resolved.

And many who do read Greek have observed that it can be resolved in various ways. We're told in Acts 4.13 that John was an unschooled layman. The Sanhedrin marveled at Peter and John because they were so influential among the people and so well-spoken, but they recognized they had no schooling.

John was an unlettered man. He probably didn't write very good Greek. It's entirely possible that he didn't write Greek any better than the Greek in the book of Revelation.

But, one difference between his writing the book of Revelation and the other books is that he wrote the book of Revelation, it may be, on the island of Patmos. The other books he wrote were probably written from Ephesus, in a church, where there were literary people. Most writings of the New Testament were not written by the hand of the author, but by what they call an amanuensis.

An amanuensis is what we might call a secretary, but more than a secretary, they didn't just take dictation, they did that. They took dictation from the author, but they also had some literary input. Anyone knows that when you're dictating a letter or dictating something, you don't really talk exactly the way that you'd write.

And an amanuensis, who took dictation, would take the speaker's words and write them into a literary piece. Peter, for example, the style of 1 Peter is very different than the style of 2 Peter. Peter, in 1 Peter 5, in verse 12, says he's writing by Silvanus, meaning that Silvanus is apparently taking dictation, and is his amanuensis.

He may have written 2 Peter without Silvanus, and that would explain why there are different

styles between 1 and 2 Peter. Paul used an amanuensis often, although sometimes he wrote with his own hand, and when he did, it was exceptional enough. He said, see what great a letter I've written with my own hand.

I've signed this with my own hand. I've written this with my own hand, especially Galatians. But Romans, for example, was not written by the hand of Paul.

He dictated it to a man named Tertius. The reason we know that is because Romans 16 is mainly a list of greetings that Paul sends to friends in Rome, and at one point he must have stopped to take a drink of water or something, and you find this line in Romans 16, I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, also greet you. And then Paul's greetings continue.

So Paul must have taken a breath or something, and Tertius decided, hey, I want to mention that I'm sending greetings too. He was obviously the one who, he said he wrote the epistle. Now, to what degree John had the services of an amanuensis for writing the gospel of John and the epistles of John, we cannot say, but he was in Ephesus where there were such services available.

When he was on the island of Patmos as a prisoner, he obviously couldn't send out for an amanuensis and would have to write in his own style. And that could easily explain why Revelation is written by a non-literary man, John. And the other books attributed to him were dictated by him, probably, to an amanuensis who had somewhat greater command of the Greek language, was a professional, polished, and that would explain a lot.

It would certainly resolve the difficulty. An alternative solution, people have suggested, is that John wrote both, all the books, but the other books he wrote in his normal state of mind. But when he wrote Revelation, he was in an excited state of mind and trying to keep up with the visions as they went by and writing in choppy Greek and not, you know, I don't know.

There are ways to resolve this, in other words. It's not necessary to assume that the great difference in Greek style must argue for a different authorship. In fact, there's a couple of very strong reasons to argue for the same authorship.

One of them is that the author simply calls himself John. In the lifetime of John the Apostle, for anyone who was not John the Apostle to write a book and simply call himself John would invite confusion. No one would know who this is.

They might even think it was the Apostle John, but he didn't say so. The Apostles always made clear who they were, or usually did, if there was any possibility of confusion. But if John was the last surviving Apostle at the time this was written, he'd be the most, whether he was or not, he would be the most famous man in the church named John.

He was the only John who was an Apostle. He might be the last surviving Apostle. He would be the old man of the church, the most famous man named John.

It's like if we're talking about evangelists, and I said Billy. Well, need I say more? Everyone knows who Billy is, at least for the time being. After he dies, it might be different.

There might be another Billy come along. But if someone just says John, during the lifetime of John the Apostle, of course the audience would not know who he was, unless he was that John. The lack of any designation necessary to identify him more exactly would suggest strongly he was the John, the most famous John, the John who needed no introduction to his readers, John the Apostle.

This is what all the early church fathers in the first two or three centuries believed, and they seem to have good reason. Here's another reason for thinking that the same author wrote all those books. There are certain ideas, although the Greek style is different, the Greek thoughts and vocabulary are very much the same in Revelation as the other books.

Here's some examples for you. The word logos, or logos, which means word, it's used as a title for Jesus only in the Johannine literature, that is the literature that John wrote. It is, of course, most famously found in John 1.1. In the beginning was the word, the logos.

But it's also found in 1 John 1, where he says, that which we have heard, that which we have seen, which we have looked upon, our hands have handled, of the word of life, referring to Jesus, the logos. So we have John in his gospel and his epistle referring to Jesus as logos. Likewise, in Revelation 19.13, John sees Jesus on a white horse and his name is called the logos, the word of God.

Apart from these three references, there is no reference in the Bible that clearly speaks of Christ by the title logos. Only John does. And Revelation does.

That's not enough by itself, but similar evidence mounts. Likewise, the reference to Christ as the lamb. Very prominent, of course, in the book of Revelation, probably 27 times or so in the book of Revelation, Jesus is called the lamb.

Elsewhere in the Bible, he's not referred to as the lamb. Except in the gospel of John, chapter one, where twice John the Baptist is quoted saying, behold the lamb of God. Now to us, lamb is a very common term to use for Christ.

Much of our Christian iconography and art has depicted him as a lamb. But it might surprise us how absent that title is from scripture with the exception of John chapter one and the book of Revelation. That's where we get the idea of Jesus being the lamb from John's writings in those two places.

Likewise, John 7, 37 and 38, Jesus calls out to anyone who thirsts and invites them to come and drink the water of life, the living water. The same invitation is given in Revelation, chapter 22, verse 17. Anyone who thirsts, let him drink of the water of life.

Only in John and Revelation. No reference to any such things elsewhere in scripture. The

expression he who overcomes or a reference to Christ as the one who overcomes or the disciples as those who overcome is very Johannine.

In John 16, 33, Jesus says, be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. In first John chapter two, verse 14, John says, I've written to you young men because you're strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the world. In first John chapter five, it says, whosoever believes that Jesus is the son of God overcomes the world.

And this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. In Revelation, in every church, there is an invitation to those whoever overcomes. Jesus is first seen in Revelation five, six and in a visionary form other than chapter one.

He is first seen as a lamb. And it says when he's introduced in Revelation five, I think it's verse five, the elder who speaks to John says, behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed. It's the same word overcome.

In Revelation 12, 11, speaking of the spiritual warfare of the Christians against Satan says they overcame him. Same word, by the blood of the lamb, by the word of their testimony. And they did not love their lives unto the death.

Overcome, overcome, overcome. Only in John's literature. It's in gospel of John.

It's in the epistle of John. It's in Revelation. You see, Revelation has many distinctly Johannine, that is, terms that are not found anywhere except in John's writings elsewhere.

The word true, of course, occurs many times throughout the scripture, but there's a particular word in the Greek for true. There's more than one word for true, but this particular word, which is a latinos, appears nine times in the gospel of John, four times in 1 John, ten times in Revelation, and in all the rest of the New Testament, only five times. In other words, it occurs in 1 John alone, almost as many times as it occurs in the rest of the New Testament, but twice as many times in the gospel of John, and twice as many times in the book of Revelation.

It's very much, though not uniquely a term that John uses, it's very much a term that John is fond of and uses a great deal, and others do not. The reference to the first resurrection in Revelation, chapter 20, in verse 5, very mysterious expression, this is the first resurrection, blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. On him the second death has no power.

What is the first resurrection? As you read almost every book in the New Testament about the resurrection, it's always just one resurrection is mentioned. The resurrection of the last day, of the end, when Jesus comes to judge the living and the dead, when he calls the sheep and the goats out on the day that he returns. There's a one resurrection, but Revelation talks about the first resurrection, suggesting at least two.

Where does that idea come from? Where can we get an explanation of that? Well, lo and

behold, only one place in the scripture, and that's in John's gospel, John chapter 5, because John chapter 5 does mention a physical resurrection in verses 28 and 29. Jesus said, do not marvel at this, the hour is coming in which all who are in the grave shall hear his voice and shall come forth, some to a resurrection of life, some to a resurrection of condemnation. All who are in the graves, that's bodies.

But four verses earlier, in John 5, 24, Jesus says, he that hears my words and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death into life. Jesus said that those who have heard and believed his words already have passed from a state of being dead to a state of being alive. That's a resurrection.

In John 5, Jesus talks about two resurrections, a spiritual resurrection, which Christians have already experienced through faith. Paul also refers to it in Ephesians, says we who are dead in trespasses and sins he has made alive with him. Being born again is a spiritual passing from death into life, it is a resurrection.

Jesus mentions two in only one passage, John chapter 5, that which is spiritual, which Christians have already experienced, that which is physical, which remains for everyone to experience at the end of the age. Thus, John alone and Revelation give the indication that there are two resurrections that Christians experience, one now, one later. It's John's theology.

There's a Greek phrase, ektereo, which is found only twice in the Bible. It is translated to keep from or to guard out of or to keep out of. I think the translation I'm using would translate keep from.

It's found in Revelation chapter 3, verse 10, where Jesus says because you've kept my command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation that is coming on all the world to test those who dwell on the earth. He says I will keep you from it. The word is ektereo, two words.

That phrase is found only one other place in the Bible. In John, not surprisingly. Chapter 17, verse 15, where Jesus was praying and he said, Father, I pray that you do not take them out of the world, but that you will keep them from.

Ektereo, the wicked one. So again, a Johannine term found only in John and Revelation. Likewise, in Revelation 12, we have the very graphic picture of Satan like a dragon losing a battle in the heavens being cast to the earth.

Revelation 12, 9. After that, a voice in heaven says, Now has come salvation and strength in the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ. For the accused of our brethren has been cast out who accused them before God day and night. That's Revelation 12, 9 and 10.

In John, chapter 12, verse 31, Jesus said, Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the ruler of this world, he means Satan, be cast out. The idea of Satan being cast out of heaven is found in John, 12, 31 and in Revelation 12.

The exact thought is not found elsewhere except there is something very similar to it in Luke. In Luke chapter 10, verse 19, where Jesus said, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. But fall is a description of the motion that Satan did.

These two passages refer to some action of him being thrown out. His falling, no doubt, is the result of being thrown out. But the throwing out involves another party.

Satan could just fall if he slipped and fell off a cliff. No one had to be present. But to be thrown out requires that someone stronger than he has overcome him and tossed him out.

And the idea of Satan being cast out is found only in those places. In the New Testament, in John and in Revelation. Also, both John and Revelation quote, but not exactly quote, the same verse in Zechariah.

Zechariah 12, 10. Neither John nor Revelation actually quote it, but they sort of cannibalize the verse and take phrases from it and put them together in an innovative way. John does.

In John chapter 19, verse 37. Revelation does. In Revelation 1, 7. Interesting that the same verse would be not quite quoted by both books.

So, these, I think, make a strong case that the author of Revelation was very much in tune with the thought of the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John. Use the same language, some of which is used nowhere else in the New Testament. I believe that we have very good grounds for accepting the apostolic authorship of this book, which means the author of the book was one of the two sons of Zebedee, one of the ones that Jesus called sons of thunder.

A good name for someone writing a book like this. A man who was one of the twelve apostles and one of the three who were called the inner circle of the apostles, Peter, James, and John, who had special closeness to Jesus. And of those three, he is the one that is referred to as the disciple that Jesus loved.

This man had a closer intimacy with Jesus than most. Even most of the other apostles. Apparently, even than Peter.

Interestingly, that the book of Revelation would be written by a man who elsewhere is called beloved, disciple, because the only other person referred to by that kind of a name was Daniel in his book. O Daniel, greatly beloved he's called. And Daniel and Revelation are obviously very similar books.

God obviously vouchsafed very similar revelations to two men that were particularly beloved by him and privileged to receive them. Now, we're out of time for tonight. We're not out of pages of our notes, and so there will be a further continuation in our introduction to Revelation in our next session.

OpenTheo

Revelation Introduction (Part 2) - Symbols and Images

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In part two of his introduction to the book of Revelation, Steve Gregg delves into the symbols and images used throughout the text. He emphasizes the importance of understanding that many of the descriptions are not meant to be taken literally, but rather symbolically. Gregg also discusses the significance of various numbers used in the text and the potential meaning behind certain events and characters mentioned. He concludes that the book of Revelation is a complex tapestry of biblical imagery that when understood in context, reveals a powerful message of divine deliverance and judgment.

Transcript

We talked last time about the authorship, because I consider the authorship of a given book to be all-important, because if the author is an apostle of Jesus Christ, then on that basis his writings belong in the New Testament. That is in fact the qualification for a book being included in the New Testament. People say, well why weren't the Gnostic Gospels included in the New Testament? Weren't there a lot of other books besides these 27 books that they wanted to put in and somebody removed? The popular yarn is that Constantine removed them, because he didn't like their theology.

Of course, that has nothing to do with the truth. The choice of the books of the New Testament was based on one criterion. Is it apostolic? The reason that the Gnostic Gospels, for example, are not in our Bible is because they were not written by apostles, although the authors lied and claimed they were.

The Gnostic Gospels, for example, which we hear so much about now, were written in the 2nd and 3rd centuries after the apostles were long dead, but they claimed to be Peter, Thomas, Philip, and Mary Magdalene, who were the writers. But they were liars. Now, if you're considering a book for inclusion in the Bible, and the very first lines in the book are a lie, it raises questions about the authenticity of the rest of the book.

If the author can't tell the truth about who he is, who knows whether he can tell the truth about anything? And that is why the Gnostic Gospels are not in our Bible, and many other works that were rejected. The criterion for including a book in the Bible, in the New Testament at least, is

that it must be written by an apostle, or at least an apostolic associate. That is, somebody so close to the apostles that he could not possibly have written without their oversight.

Someone like Luke, who traveled incessantly with Paul, and no doubt wrote both Luke and Acts while Paul was with him, and probably didn't sneak it out without Paul taking a look at it. After all, Acts was mostly about Paul. I doubt if Luke would have published that without Paul proofreading it, at the very least.

The fact that Luke was so closely associated with Paul means that his books are apostolic, at least receive apostolic approval. Likewise, Mark, who traveled with Peter, though Mark was not an apostle, his book is considered apostolic because the early fathers said that Mark was simply translating what Peter preached. So that that gospel, though we call it the gospel of Mark, is really the gospel according to Peter, as translated by Mark.

So, in other words, to include a book in our Bible, in our New Testament, requires that the author is apostolic. Is the author of Revelation apostolic? That took a long time for the Church to decide. The book of Revelation was the last book to be accepted into the New Testament by the Church.

It wasn't until 396 A.D. that the Church finally decided to include it. The question was, was it written by John the Apostle or another John? The author five times refers to himself as John. He simply says, I, John.

He does not say which John he is, which is one of the strongest arguments for being the apostle. Because in the time of the Apostle John, anyone named John would have to tell who he was, unless he was the Apostle John. The Apostle John was the most famous John in the Church, probably the last surviving apostle in those days.

To simply say John would call to mind John the Apostle, unless one would qualify that, no, I'm John this other guy. I'm not THE John, I'm another John. The author just calls himself John and the early Church, for the most part, all the Church fathers whose writings have come down to us, have said this was the Apostle John.

The son of Zebedee, brother of James, one of the four fishermen, one of the two signs of thunder. One of the twelve apostles, and part of the inner circle of three, and the one that Jesus loved. That's that John.

And if it was that John who wrote it, then the book belongs in our Bible just like the Gospel of John. Or the Epistles of John, or any other book written by any apostle belongs in our Bible. And I accept that John did write it, but that was disputed for some time, and actually continues to be disputed among some.

Because the style of Greek is very different in Revelation than in John's other known writings. And so some have thought a different man must have written it. But we talked last time about various reasons why that style could differ and still be by the same man.

We will not go over that again. We come now to important considerations that we have to look at if we're going to make sense out of a book that is really quite enigmatic. A book that has symbols that puzzle most people.

I perhaps should say that puzzle all people, except for people that don't realize they're puzzled. You see, there are people who think, I mean the first reading they say, oh I get it. And what they mean is, I just take it at face value.

You know, I just read what it says and I just believe what it says. God, and I've heard people say this, God says what he means and he means what he says. Therefore, if it says the blood shall flow to the horse's bridles, then so be it.

The blood's going to flow up to the horse's bridles, literally. God wouldn't say it if he didn't mean it. On the other hand, the book is full of symbolism.

And you can't take everything just at face value. For example, in Revelation 5, 6, John sees Jesus. What does Jesus look like? Well, you and I should suspect that Jesus looks like a man with holes in his hands and feet.

That's what he looked like when he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection and when he ascended into heaven. But when John sees Jesus in Revelation 5, 6, he sees a lamb with seven eyes and seven horns. Now, I think any reasonable person would recognize that's a symbolic description of Jesus.

He is not literally a lamb. To call him the lamb conveys certain information about his redemptive sacrifice, but he is not a lamb. He does not have wool.

He does not walk on all fours. He does not have cloven hooves. And he does not have seven eyes and seven horns.

He's not that monstrous. But seven eyes and seven horns are very meaningful symbols in the Jewish symbolism and numerology. So we can see that Jesus is not at all depicted literally.

Something like 27 times in the book, he's called the lamb. That's the normal term for Jesus, the lamb. And that is a symbol.

As I said last time, we are so accustomed to thinking of Jesus as the lamb of God or even depicting him as a lamb in Christian iconography and classical artwork that we forget, oh yeah, a lamb, that's not a literal description of him. He really is not a lamb. He's a person, a human being.

But he is called the lamb, and that's a symbolic way of speaking of him. The devil is called a dragon. The devil is not a dragon.

He's a spirit. He's not a mythical beast, nor is he literally a serpent. He's called that too.

The devil is not a reptilian. He is a spirit being. But he is depicted symbolically as a dragon and as a reptile.

That's how Revelation is. It's written symbols. And people say, well, I just take it at face value.

Well, they're going to be misunderstanding it. They're confused, but they don't know they are. The person who is much better off who reads the book of Revelation knows they're confused and knows that there's more here than immediately meets the eye and that there's things to contemplate, things to research, things to meditate upon, things to pray about, things to compare Scripture with Scripture to gain understanding and to interpret.

That's what a book like this requires. Now, I mentioned that I sometimes meet people who say, well, the Bible wasn't written for scholars. Why should we have to learn Greek or Hebrew? The Bible was written for common people.

But, of course, the answer is the Bible was written for common people who read Greek and Hebrew, not who read English. People who don't read Greek and Hebrew have to study it to know it. We don't know it intuitively.

They did. Common people back then knew some things already that we have to study a great deal to know. They knew what apocalyptic literature was.

They read a lot of it. They knew that certain books were written to convey certain ideas in a certain strange way. They had read many books of that type.

We have not. The Book of Revelation may be the only book we've read like that. And if we've read any others, it's probably Daniel or Zechariah.

But we do not read a lot of books like this. And, therefore, studying the whole genre of apocalyptic literature becomes helpful to us, although it would be unnecessary for the original readers. They already had that familiarity already in place as part of their mental furniture.

That doesn't come with us factory installed. We have to learn it. And so that's why we have to look into these matters.

Now, one thing we have to understand about Revelation is it has stylistic features that other books of the New Testament do not have. Some books of the Old Testament have them. I mentioned Daniel and Zechariah.

Ezekiel has them. But most books, even of the Old Testament, don't have them. It's pretty unusual in the Bible to find apocalyptic writings.

But it's not unheard of. It's just unusual. But I want to talk about the symbolism that is used in the Book of Revelation.

First of all, we find as we read the book that people, nations, and spiritual beings like the devil

or like demons or like Jesus, they're depicted like animals. I mentioned Jesus is depicted as a lamb. The devil is a dragon.

There are a swarm of locusts that are almost certainly references to demons. Represented as locusts. There's an animal with seven heads and ten horns that is said to rule the world.

Now, by the way, even the people who say they take the Book of Revelation literally do not believe the world will ever be ruled by an animal with seven heads and ten horns. They realize, oh, well, that stands for such and such. Well, as soon as you say that stands for such and such, you've said it's not literal.

It stands for something that is literal. It is not literal. It is a symbol.

And so we see that animals of various kinds are a common image and symbol for things that are not really animals. People, spirits, nations, kingdoms, and so forth. That's one thing.

Also, we find that in the Book of Revelation there are two women that predominate the picture. One is a bride and the other is a harlot. They are also equated with two cities.

The harlot is equated with Babylon. The bride with Jerusalem. And these metaphors are mixed in peculiar ways.

For example, in Revelation 21, the opening verses, especially verse 2, John says, I saw the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven dressed like a bride, adorned for her husband. Now, you almost just have to work with the words and try to avoid images. How do you dress a city like a bride? How do you dress a city in clothing at all? Cities don't dress in clothing.

And therefore, we realize that this is all very symbolic. We're talking about what is symbolically called a city, but is also symbolically called a bride. As it turns out, that same entity is referred to as the Lamb's wife.

And since the Lamb is symbolic of Jesus, the Lamb's wife must be the bride of Jesus, which would be the church. Therefore, we find that the church is depicted as a woman, a bride, which would be a pure and faithful woman, and also likened to a city, a new Jerusalem. But something or someone is depicted as a harlot, whose name is Mystery Babylon the Great.

Now, Babylon, revealed in chapter 17 of Revelation, is one of those images that there's some explanations given about. But the explanation is not very helpful. The woman is seen riding on a beast with seven heads and ten horns.

An angel says to John, let me explain this to you. The seven heads on the beast that the woman is sitting on, those are seven mountains that the woman sits on. There are also seven kings.

Five are fallen, one now is, and one is yet to come. And there's an eighth one of the seven. Well, I'm glad that's cleared up.

That's one of the few things that's cleared up. And that's as clear as mud. But it goes on to say at the end of that chapter, that woman that you saw riding on the beast is that great city that rules over the kings of the earth.

So we need to find out what city is it that John is told is ruling over the kings of the earth. And that is the one that is symbolically called Babylon. You see, the New Jerusalem isn't the literal Jerusalem.

The Mystery Babylon isn't the literal Babylon. Nor are either of these cities literal women. These are symbols.

The book is full of symbolism. It's cast in symbols from beginning to end. Also, persons and places are given symbolic names.

For example, there's a woman in the church of Ptyra, and she's referred to as Jezebel. Now, of course, there could be a real woman named Jezebel. There was at least once a woman by that name.

But the likelihood that the woman in this church is really named Jezebel is not very great. For one thing, it would be too coincidental. The woman called Jezebel is teaching God's servants to fornicate and to worship idols.

Well, that's exactly what Jezebel in the Old Testament did in Israel. It would be almost too coincidental that we find a woman in the church teaching the same things that Jezebel in the Old Testament taught. And lo and behold, her real name is Jezebel.

Not likely. She is called Jezebel because she's like Jezebel. Just like John the Baptist is called Elijah because he's like Elijah.

Or Jesus in some of the Old Testament prophets is called David because he's like David. Old Testament characters, sometimes their names are taken to describe persons whose real names are not given but who bear a likeness to them. And so a woman whose name probably was not Jezebel but who was actually teaching in the church of Thyatira is referred to as Jezebel.

That woman, Jezebel, Jesus says. The city where the Lord was crucified, which we would call Jerusalem since that's its name, is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt in Revelation 11.8. It says that the two witnesses, their bodies after slain, lay in the streets of that great city which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt. And then John says, where our Lord was crucified.

Well, we know where the Lord was crucified, the city of Jerusalem. But it is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt. It's symbolic names given to people and places.

Obviously Babylon, as I mentioned, the mystery Babylon in chapter 17 is not really Mesopotamian Babylon where Nebuchadnezzar ruled. Or more recently, Saddam Hussein. It's not the place we call Babylon.

It is that great city that rules over the kings of the earth and is the harlot drunk with the blood of martyrs. That's at least what we get from Revelation 17. And so it's not really Babylon.

That's a symbolic name. New Jerusalem is a symbolic name. The book is full of symbolic names.

Also, you should recognize as symbolic the frequent and recurring references to cosmic and geological disruptions. Things like earthquakes. Things like stars falling from the sky.

The sun going dark. These images are found fairly commonly in certain parts of the Old Testament when they are actually referring to political upheavals. The fall of, for example, historical Babylon in Isaiah 13.10. When Isaiah is talking about how Babylon will fall to the Medes and Persians, which did happen in 539 B.C. It says the sun will be darkened.

The sun will not give its light. The stars will fall from the heavens. This is what Isaiah says happened when Babylon fell in ancient times.

It didn't really literally happen. That is itself apocalyptic language. And so in Revelation we see those kinds of phenomena.

The heavens rolled up like a scroll. And this is early in the story. You know, if it happened at the very end, we might say, well, I guess that's the end of the world.

The curtain falls. The scroll is rolled up. The heavens are gone.

But it happens in chapter 6. And we have to realize that this kind of language, the readers would have recognized instantly as language of apocalyptic literature. It is not literally the case that stars fall to the earth. How many stars do you suppose could literally fall to the earth? How big are the stars? How many could land on the earth? Wouldn't it be more like the earth would have to fall into a star and it would be like a BB falling into the ocean? The stars are so much bigger than the earth.

To suggest that literal stars are going to fall to the earth, I don't want to pop your bubble or something, but that's not going to happen. No stars are going to fall to the earth. But we find stars falling to the earth.

One of them has a key to the bottom of this pit. A star with a key to a pit that's bottomless. And it opens the pit and out come these insects or arachnids or whatever they are.

They're said to be like locusts, but they're not very much like locusts because locusts eat green things. And the locusts that come out of the pit do not touch any green thing. Locusts, according to Proverbs chapter 30, have no king over them.

But these locusts have a king over them named Abaddon and Apollyon. These locusts are not a danger to plants, but to people. They have stingers like scorpions.

They have faces like men. Hair like women. Now don't look at me.

I'm not one of them. Although I did know a fellow who styled himself as a Bible teacher back in the 70s. Who taught Revelation and he thought the locusts must be the hippies.

Because they have faces like men and hair like women. He was serious. He was an old guy.

He knows better now. But the locusts are not real insects. They're not real locusts.

That's symbolic. But the thing is, they are released from a bottomless pit by a star that falls to the earth with a key. Now if you can't recognize that as symbolic, I'm afraid we're not going to get very far together here.

That's not literal. The book is full of symbolism. Also, the numbers in the book need to be recognized as symbolic as well.

For one thing, the most prominent number in the book, obviously, is the number 7. And you can find many uses of the number 7 in the Old Testament. In places where it's very clear that it's not used as a literal figure in the Old Testament. For example, it says, The righteous man falls seven times, but the Lord upholds him.

Or, you know, seven times in the night I will arise to praise you. Or many references to 7, which are, I think all Bible scholars, regardless of their view of Revelation, I think all Bible scholars would say the number 7 in Hebrew numerology means completeness. Perfection or completeness.

So it means something total. Now, therefore, a series of seven judgments would refer to a total judgment. For Jesus to have seven eyes means he sees totally everything.

He's, in others, omniscient. For him to have seven horns, an image from the Old Testament, the horn is power. Usually in the figurative language of the Old Testament, a king or kingdom might have horns.

Like a ram has horns. Or a he-goat in Daniel 8 has a horn. It refers to political power.

The horn is the animal's power. David always talks in his psalms about how God exalted his horn. He's talking about how God exalted him to power.

Now, Jesus has seven horns. The number 7 meaning completeness. He's got all power.

To say the Lamb has seven eyes and seven horns is simply an apocalyptic way of saying he's omniscient and omnipotent. The number 7 is not the literal number of eyes that grace the face of Jesus. And he does not have horns on his head, not 7 or any other number.

But the number 7 is symbolic for completeness. Now, that should tip us off. The number 7 is woven through the fabric of the book of Revelation all the way through.

It begins with an announcement that the book is addressed to seven churches in Asia. Asia in

Revelation is a reference to the Roman province of Asia, which corresponds in boundaries with our modern country of Turkey. These seven churches were existing churches, it is true, but there were more than seven in Turkey.

We don't know how many there were, but we know of at least three others. Troas is not mentioned in this list. Colossi was in that same region.

Hierapolis, those three churches are mentioned elsewhere in scripture in the same region, Turkey, but they're not mentioned here. Only seven churches are named. Why? No doubt they are considered to be representative of the whole church, the total church, hence seven churches.

There are seven spirits of God in Revelation. There are seven angels of the seven churches. There are seven seals on the scroll, which then are broken, and there are seven trumpets then that are blown.

There are seven thunders in chapter 10. There are seven vials or bowls of wrath in chapter 16. The number 7 is woven through.

In fact, those are the times where it actually mentions that there are seven. That is, those are the occasions where there are seven trumpets, there are seven bowls. There's a lot of other sevens in there that the writer doesn't call attention to.

For example, there are seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation. A beatitude is a statement that begins with the words, Blessed are the, you know, the beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount are the most famous ones. There are seven such beatitudes throughout the book of Revelation, and many other sevens in the book.

It's a book of sevens. And when you find the number seven, you should not think it's talking about a statistical unit. The numbers of Revelation are not statistical.

They are impressionistic. They are conveying ideas. Seven is the symbol for perfection.

Now, other numbers are also found recurrent in the book of Revelation. When the seven trumpets sound, each of them seems to affect one-third of some domain. A third of the sea turns to blood.

A third of the rivers turn bitter. A third of mankind dies. A third of the city falls.

There's a lot of references to the third. Now, a third, I believe, I can say with some confidence, although this is not identified for us anywhere in Scripture, I believe a third means a significant minority. It is the largest whole fraction less than one-half.

And so it's a minority in that it's less than a half. But it's a large minority. It's as large a whole fraction as you can get under a half.

So it is a significant minority. In Zechariah 8, I think it's chapter 8, it talks about how God, it might be chapter 3, as a matter of fact, but in Zechariah it talks about how God's going to purge the city of Jerusalem and a third of them will be spared and two-thirds will be wiped out. It just means a remnant, a significant minority, a third will be preserved.

It doesn't mean literally one-third. Ezekiel was told to shave his head and divide his hair into thirds and to chop up one of the thirds with a knife, to burn one-third with fire and throw a third of it into the wind and let it blow around. He said, these are the things I'm going to do to Jerusalem.

I'm going to kill a third of them with the sword, a third of them are going to be burned with fire, a third of them are going to be dispersed into all the world. These are not neat fractions. This just means there's going to be a significant portion, a minority that would die by the sword, a significant portion or minority would be scattered.

And so in Revelation, the word third, the third should not be thought to be a literal number. I mean, if it was, it would stand out against all the rest of the book of Revelation in that the rest is symbolic. It would be very strange for that number to be absolutely literal, especially when other places in the Bible it is not.

The number 12 is found in some occurrences. There are 24 elders around the throne, obviously twice 12. There's 144,000 persons who received the mark of God on their forehead before the judgments were poured out in chapter 7, and they're mentioned again in chapter 14.

144,000 is obviously a multiple of 12. It's 12 times 12,000. In the city of the New Jerusalem, there's 12 foundations with the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb on them.

There's 12 gates. The number 12 seems to be the number that signifies God's people because God's people in the Old Testament were divided into the 12 tribes of Israel. In the New Testament, God's people are represented by the 12 apostles.

And so multiples of 12 are simply the number 12. Although in the case of the number of apostles, it's the statistical number, the usage of it as a number of foundations to the city no doubt suggests that we're just talking about the people of God, the apostles as a group. The 24 elders before the throne probably just represent God's people, a symbol for God's people.

At least that's what most commentators think. And there's not very many things that most commentators agree on. That's one of the few.

Now, where this gets rather interesting in the symbolic use of numbers is that there's the famous 1,000 years in Revelation 20. Famous because it is the only reference in the Bible to 1,000 years. The millennium.

Some have said that Revelation 20 is the most controversial chapter in the Bible because theologians have divided over the interpretation of that 1,000 years since early times. The early

church fathers divided over it. Many of them believed it was a literal 1,000 years.

Others did not. And the 1,000 years, what is it? Well, we'll have to decide that when we get to chapter 20. We'll have to take it in its context and see what clues we have.

But suffice it to say there's no reason to take it as an exactly literal number. Why would it be literal there when the other numbers are not? And especially when the number 1,000 is not used literally anywhere else in Scripture. In the Psalms, in Deuteronomy, in 2 Peter, in many places the number 1,000 is used but never literally.

God owns the cattle on 1,000 hills. Exactly? 1,000? Not 1,001? No, 1,000 hills. He keeps covenant to 1,000 generations.

A day in His sight is as 1,000 years when it is passed. And as a watch in the night, Psalm 90 verse 4 says. Peter says, a day to the Lord is like 1,000 years, and 1,000 years is like a day.

1,000 years literally? I believe we have to understand here, as Peter certainly intends, that he's not talking about a literal 1,000 years corresponding to a literal day. He's saying that 1,000 years, which is a long time to us, is like a day, a short time, to God. And the 1,000 years in Revelation, if it is more literal than in the other places in the Bible where it's not literal, that would be very surprising since Revelation is the most symbolic book in the whole Bible.

It would be strange for no other book in the Bible to use it literally, and yet Revelation is the one that does. I believe it's a mistake to take it literally, but I will not go into the details as to what I believe it refers to right now. Some of you already know what I think, and some of you probably couldn't care less what I think.

And that's okay too. But suffice it to say, when we look at the numbers in the book of Revelation, they are not generally statistical. I don't think they ever are.

The church of Smyrna is told that they will have tribulation for 10 days. I've never read a commentator that thought that was a literal 10 days. It is said in chapter 17, there are 10 kings that give their authority to the beast for one hour.

I do not know any commentator that believes that's a literal 60 minutes. These numbers, these time designations are impressionistic. An hour means a short time.

10 days means, when it comes to being in jail, it means long enough to be uncomfortable, but short enough to not be a crisis. A thousand years means a very long time. Many generations in duration.

So long you'd stop counting, probably. But the point is, the numbers are symbolic. Now there's also interesting parallelism in Revelation.

I won't go into that too much, because people disagree as to what degree that is true. Some people think that there are seven parallel sections. This is particularly the view of those who

hold what is usually called the idealist view of Revelation.

They say that Revelation is like a Greek drama. It's got seven acts, and each act is divided into seven scenes. Well, that's very neat, and it's really almost intuitively correct.

Why not? Seven is everywhere in the book. Why wouldn't there be seven acts, each one divided into seven scenes? However, it's not really that neat. It is possible and reasonable to divide the book into seven portions.

To call them acts would be okay. I don't have any objection to that. There are definitely seven natural divisions of the book.

Now dividing those into seven subsections each, it gets a little trickier. Now the first section that is usually identified, chapters one through three, is the seven letters of the seven churches. That's pretty compact.

That's pretty unmistakable. The next section, chapters four through seven, is the seven seals of the book. That's easy to identify too.

Then you have the seven trumpets in chapters eight through eleven. But after that, you've got chapters twelve, thirteen, fourteen, there's no sevens of anything there. Seven great signs in heaven.

That's what they usually say, seven great signs. I've tried to count them. You have to kind of ignore a few to keep it at seven.

I don't want to contradict you, but I definitely have read 50 commentaries on Revelation, and they do say that section is seven signs. I have tried to discover them without the help of the commentators, and I have to use the commentators because they're not evident. Let me say this.

There may be, indeed, seven signs in that particular act. I could not deny it, but I could not affirm it. All I'm saying is it's not as obvious in that one as it is in some of the ones where they're actually numbered, like the seven bowls of wrath in chapter 16.

Once you get past chapter 16, the identification of seven this and that is much more difficult, and I've seen it done many different ways by different commentators. I do not object to someone saying the book of Revelation is divided into seven acts, each having seven scenes. I would just say that the seven scenes in some of those cases are going to be a little arbitrary.

That would be my judgment call about it. I'm not objecting to it in principle. I'm just saying I cannot establish it from my own research.

Now, on this view, many commentators believe, especially the idealist commentators, that these seven segments, these seven acts, are parallel to each other. For example, each of them can be found to have a reference in them to the second coming of Christ. And the idealist view,

which is not the view I hold, holds that each of these acts is about the whole age of the church.

One sees the age of the church through the figure of seven churches. One through the figure of judgments that, through the whole church age, are represented as seven seals being broken. Another sees seven trumpets, another seven bowls of wrath, and that these actually are parallel to each other.

One of the parallels that is often pointed out, which I find extremely impressive, actually, although I don't buy into the scheme entirely, it's rather interesting that as you look at the seven trumpets and you look at the seven bowls of wrath, it's rather interesting, on page four of your notes it's in there, the first trumpet and the first bowl both affect the earth. The second trumpet and the second bowl affect the sea. The third trumpet and the third bowl affect the rivers of water.

The fourth trumpet and the fourth bowl affect the heavenly bodies, sun, moon, and stars. The fifth, and this is even more impressive than any of the others before, the fifth trumpet and the fifth bowl affect the river Euphrates. Now that gets more specific and more coincidental if it's not intended.

And the seventh of each seems to bring us to the end of the world, or the end of the series at least. So there seems to be some parallelism there. The significance of the parallelism might be questioned and different people might take different approaches to it.

For example, many people feel that since the trumpet judgments affect one third of everything and the bowl judgments affect the totality of everything, but they affect the same realms, that the trumpets represent a partial judgment in these realms and the bowl a final and complete judgment. Those are all things we'll have to consider the merits of when we come to the relevant passages. The only point I'm making is there seem to be some parallels.

For example, we find the birth of Jesus in Revelation 12. In others we find the beginning of the church age, beginning in chapter 12. It is possible we find the beginning of the church age in chapter 20 as well.

So that chapter 12 and chapter 20 would have some degree of overlap or parallel between them. We seem to find the end of the world at the end of chapter 11 and at the end of chapter 19. Now that's disputed in both cases.

But the language has led many to believe we've got the second coming of Jesus with the blowing of the seventh trumpet in chapter 11 and with the rider on the white horse in chapter 19. Now Jesus isn't going to come again twice. If these are talking about the second coming of Jesus, it's discussed in two different places.

And therefore there would be parallel things in the book of Revelation, at least something to consider. Now, Revelation interplays with the rest of the scriptures in a way that is very, well, it's unique. In that, unlike most New Testament books, the book of Revelation does not quote a

single Old Testament scripture.

There is no exact quotation of the Old Testament anywhere in the book of Revelation. However, the imagery of the Old Testament is all there is in the book of Revelation. It's like a reworking, a rehashing of images and thoughts that are found in Daniel and Ezekiel and Isaiah and the Exodus.

I mean, it's like everything in Revelation is a rehash of something from the Old Testament. There's not so much as a single direct quote. But the degree to which the Old Testament imagery weaves together to make the fabric of what we call the book of Revelation is astonishing when you see how much scripture is rewoven together by this author or by the Holy Spirit, I believe.

Those who don't believe it's inspired would have to speculate about how a man could be such a genius as to be able to take hundreds of images from the Old Testament and weave them together into a narrative as amazingly as the book of Revelation has. To my mind, it's frankly one of the evidences to my own subjective judgment that we're dealing with a book that God has revealed and inspired rather than something man put together. If it was put together by man, the book of Revelation is the most astonishing piece of composition of religious literature that probably has ever been written.

But, for example, the book in the Old Testament that is most frequently alluded to and provides more images than any other for the book of Revelation is actually Isaiah. We usually think of Daniel. When we read Revelation, we think of Daniel being the most like it.

Well, Daniel's a lot like it, but Isaiah actually provides more material for Revelation than any other Old Testament book. 79 allusions to things in the book of Isaiah are found in the book of Revelation. Then comes Daniel.

53 allusions to Daniel are in the book of Revelation. And we're talking about a short book you can read through probably in a half hour. It's got 22 chapters, but they're short.

And you can probably read through the book in not much more than a half hour. And yet it's got hundreds of allusions to the Old Testament. 79 from Isaiah, 53 from Daniel, 48 from Ezekiel.

By the way, 48 is conservative. I actually was reading an article about Revelation by somebody. I don't remember who it was recently, but he believed the whole book of Revelation is a reworking of the book of Ezekiel.

He felt that Ezekiel, the book of Ezekiel, provides the very framework for the book of Revelation. It was a rather intriguing thesis, but I didn't have time to really analyze it. I was doing something else and just happened to come across it.

But the number of allusions to Ezekiel that this author thought were in Revelation was more like 84 rather than 48. The Psalms, 43 times. The book of Revelation alludes to something in the

Psalms.

The book of Exodus. Parallels to Exodus exist in Revelation 27 times. 22 times to Jeremiah.

15 times to Zechariah, which is more than one time per chapter of Zechariah. Zechariah is only 14 chapters, yet there are 15 places in Zechariah that are alluded to in the book of Revelation. Amos, 9 times.

And the book of Joel, 8 times. Now if you total those up, that's a few hundred. So you've got... I didn't do the math, but you can see it just intuitively.

That certainly adds up to more than a couple hundred. And so we can see how thoroughly the book of Revelation involves the rest of Scripture. And more than I've already said.

We'll talk about it a little more in a moment. But I want to say that while the book of Revelation does not quote from any other part of the Bible, and alludes hundreds of times to different parts, it uses images from other parts of the Bible, but it doesn't use them the same way. Which is even more creative or just confusing.

For example, the two witnesses in Revelation chapter 11. We are told that they are the two olive trees that stand in the presence of the Lord. Well that image, as anyone who knows the Old Testament will recognize, comes from Zechariah chapter 4, where there are two anointed ones who stand before the presence of the Lord.

They're called the two olive trees. That's where the book of Revelation gets that phrase. The two olive trees from Zechariah chapter 4. But in Zechariah 4, generally speaking, scholars believe the two olive trees are Zerubbabel and Joshua, the political and religious leader of the exiles who returned from Babylon in Zechariah's day.

In other words, the two olive trees in Zechariah would be, if scholars are generally correct, Zerubbabel and Joshua, men who lived five and a half centuries before Christ. But that certainly isn't who the two witnesses are. I don't know of any commentators or scholars that would identify the two witnesses in Revelation as Zerubbabel and Joshua.

They might identify them as Elijah and Enoch, or Elijah and Moses, or some other two, but I've never heard a single theory that they are Zerubbabel and Joshua. And yet the term, the two olive trees, which is what they're called, refers to those other men in the Old Testament, but the image is picked up and reused, but reapplied. One commentator on the book of Revelation called his commentary a rebirth of images, that Revelation has taken images from the Old Testament and kind of reincarnated them into different settings and different meanings.

As I said, that makes it very creative and also very confusing, but it is not as if we can't make sense of it. I'm admitting to you that the book is very confusing, and I certainly would admit that I don't understand everything in it, but I have been working on it for about 43 years, and most of the things in the book of Revelation I think we can make some sense of. There will be

some things I'll just have to say, I don't know what they mean, but part of it is because it's such a complex tapestry of biblical images from other parts of the Bible that are now brought together in innovative and new ways.

Now, among the ways that the book of Revelation interacts with the rest of Scripture is that it repeats images, especially from the period of the Exodus. Many references in the book of Revelation recall the Exodus. For example, in Revelation 1.5, it says in the Alexandrian text, it says Christ freed us by his blood.

Now, if you have the King James or the New King James, and by the way, I use the New King James in this study, they follow the Textus Receptus, and it reads differently. In the Textus Receptus, it says he cleansed us, or washed us with his blood. In the Alexandrian text, which all the modern translations use, it says he freed us with his blood.

Now, it's hard to choose between those two, because either of those two could be verified from cross-references. Certainly, to say Jesus washed us by his blood has other references. For example, 1 John 1.7. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

And other places that talk about being washed in the blood, even later in Revelation, says they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. So, for Revelation 1.5 to say that Christ has washed us in his blood is quite orthodox and fitting. But many manuscripts, the oldest, say he freed us by his blood.

And that, too, presents no theological difficulty at all. But it suggests the image of the Passover. That the blood of the Passover Lamb, applied to the lintels and the doorposts of the houses of Israel in Egypt, freed them from Egypt.

That was their deliverance from Pharaoh. It is to say we were freed by his blood would recall Christ our Passover. That's what Paul calls Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 5.7, Paul says Christ our Passover has been slain for us. So, it's one or the other. Now, if you prefer the oldest manuscripts, the phrase is he has freed us by his blood, which is a clear allusion back to the Exodus.

And it would fit much of the rest of the book of Revelation that echoes the Exodus as well. For example, the persecutor of God's people in Revelation 11.8, which is identified with Jerusalem, is actually spiritually called Egypt. In other words, Jerusalem has become the new Egypt.

Israel was originally delivered from Egypt, but now Jerusalem has become the new Egypt, the new persecutor. Spiritually, it's called Egypt. And, the dragon who persecutes the woman in Revelation 12.3, that is the image of a dragon, is also like Egypt.

In Ezekiel 29.3 and Psalm 74.13, Egypt is referred to as the dragon in the sea. Just an image for Egypt that is used in some of the Old Testament passages. And that image of Satan persecuting the woman uses the image of a dragon, which would recall to the Jewish reader the image of

Egypt persecuting the people.

Interestingly, the woman, who is very similar to Israel, I mean, she's got a crown of 12 stars on her head, she's clothed with the sun, she stands on the moon, all those things recall Joseph's dream about the family of Jacob, Joseph's dream about the sun and the moon and the 11 stars bowing down to him. The woman in Revelation 12 is identified with Israel in some way. The dragon recalls Egypt, although, of course, the dragon in Revelation is Satan.

The imagery recalls Egypt. And, the dragon chases the woman into the wilderness. That's what happened in the Exodus.

Egypt pursued Israel and they fled into the wilderness. What then? In Revelation 12, God sustains her in the wilderness, just like God sent manna to Israel in the wilderness and sustained them. And even in the wilderness, the earth opens up and swallows a flood that the dragon sends out, just like the earth opened up to swallow up Korah and his rebellion after the Exodus.

So, there's lots of images here of the Exodus. They're kind of a little esoteric in some cases, but they're really intended. And so, we find that the plagues in Revelation, for the most part, are repetitions of the plagues of Egypt.

There were 10 plagues in Egypt. Not all of them are repeated in Revelation, but the majority of them are. In Revelation, you find a plague of darkness, a plague of hail, a plague of locusts, a plague of boils, a plague of frogs, a plague of water turning into blood, and so forth.

These are echoes, and deliberate echoes, of the Exodus. We should be cautious about assuming that these are literal events. The book of Revelation is an apocalypse, and it uses symbolism.

And to say that all the oceans turned to blood, and all the fish died, and all the ships of the sea sank, I mean, that's pretty striking. And there's many people who say, well, that's gonna happen in the end times. Well, maybe it isn't.

I'm not so sure this is predicting something like that happening in the end times. I'm not sure it's even literal at all. But it is intending to recall the plagues of Egypt, and therefore to make a connection to what is going on in this story, to what went on in the Exodus.

And we'll, of course, look at these things individually as we come to them. Those who are saved in Revelation sing the song of Moses. In Revelation 15.3, they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.

In Exodus 15, they sang the song of Moses when they came through the Red Sea. In Revelation 15, the saved who seem to be in heaven are singing the song of Moses too. Why? Because their deliverance, which is also the song of the Lamb, parallels that deliverance that was celebrated in the song of Moses in the book of Exodus.

And so forth. Also, of course, right after Israel came out of Egypt, God gave instructions for the building of the tabernacle and the furniture of the tabernacle, and so forth. And most of that tabernacle furniture reappears in the book of Revelation up in heaven.

You remember when God told Moses how to build the ark and the table to show bread, and so forth, that God continually said, make sure that you make everything exactly according to the pattern that I showed you on the mountain. Which sounds as if the tabernacle and its furniture that was made by Moses was patterned after some archetype that God, a transcendent archetype that God showed him, perhaps a heavenly counterpart, that Moses was shown that he was to make an earthly model of in the tabernacle. It's possible that John saw that same heavenly counterpart, because up in heaven, when he's up there, he sees things like the golden lampstand, he sees the ark of the covenant, he sees the altar of sacrifice, he sees the holy of holies.

These things are mentioned throughout the book of Revelation as things that John sees in heaven, reminiscent certainly of the Exodus, since those things first appear and are described in the Exodus. And so also, we find Revelation has these echoes of the Exodus, but also echoes of the Babylonian exile. Not so many.

Not anywhere near as much. But in the Old Testament, the Babylonian exile resembles the bondage of Egypt. Twice in Israel's history, the whole nation was in bondage in a foreign land, away from the promised land.

Once in Egypt, once in Babylon. In both cases, God delivered them and brought them back to the promised land. In the Exodus, they escaped from Egypt and eventually ended up in Canaan.

In the Babylonian instance, through Cyrus the Persian, conquering Babylon, the Jews were allowed to go back and restore their nation again too. Twice God delivered Israel from bondage. In the Exodus and in the return of exiles from Babylon.

Both of these events become types. In the Old Testament, they are types of the Messiah's salvation of us. Christ's salvation is a second Exodus.

It is a second deliverance from the exile. And in Revelation, we've got the Exodus and the Babylonian exile as milieu informing some of the visions. For example, I mentioned there's Babylon in there.

Babylon is the enemy who's drunk with the blood of martyrs. And many times, in Revelation, we are told Babylon is fallen. Well, that's exactly what happened when God delivered Israel from Babylon.

Jeremiah chapter 51 talks about how Babylon is fallen. In fact, the line comes from Jeremiah and predicting that God would cause Babylon to fall to the means of the Persians, which would result in Israel being delivered. It's like a second Exodus, this time from Babylon.

And that imagery of that historical second Exodus is now brought up alongside echoes of the original Exodus. Now we have Babylon falling again. Interestingly, in Revelation 16, one of the things that happens when the bowls are poured out is the rivers of the Euphrates dried up to make way for the kings of the east.

Now, if you read popular commentaries on Revelation, it is often said that this is something going to happen in the tribulation period. The kings of the east, they say, are China. You've probably heard this if you've been around.

The Chinese army, numbering 200 million men, is going to march into the Battle of Armageddon. For that purpose, God is going to dry up the river Euphrates. I believe it was Hal Lindsay who said, you know, the Russians have built a dam up at the top of the river Euphrates, so it can happen.

They can dam up the river Euphrates, then the Chinese armies can march across, and Revelation says the river Euphrates dried up to make way for the kings of the east to come. Marvelous. But has it occurred to anybody that we no longer live in a time when rivers pose any obstacle to armies? You don't need to dry up rivers to invade a country.

Most of the time you come by air. Or you don't come at all, you just send your missiles on ahead. Drying up rivers was what had to be done for ancient armies, not for modern armies.

The river Euphrates would not, it being dried up would not make a lick of difference for a Chinese force to invade Israel. They don't need to dry up the river Euphrates. The river wouldn't slow them down a second.

To suggest that this is predicting that, to my mind, is silly, if I might be rude. But to recognize that the drying up of the river Euphrates for the kings of the east to come in is an echo of the fall of Babylon in the Old Testament is sensible. Since the fall of Babylon is repeatedly mentioned in the book of Revelation, the fact that the river Euphrates was dried up to make way for the kings of the east reminds us of how Babylon historically fell.

Cyrus, the king of Persia from the east, brought his armies against Babylon and could not invade it except under the walls where the river Euphrates ran. So he rerouted the river, dried up the river Euphrates and marched his armies, the kings of the east, under the wall and conquered Babylon. Thus Babylon fell.

The language of Revelation is reminiscent of the fall of Babylon. Because why? Because that was like another exodus. That's like the judgment of Egypt by which Israel escaped Egypt and went to the land.

So the fall of Babylon was another instance of the same phenomenon. God delivers Israel so they can go back to their land. These are the images that make up the milieu of the book of Revelation.

Of course, it's not talking about those events. It's talking about something else. Something after John's time that in principle is like those things.

Obviously, the book of Revelation is talking about some kind of salvation. Some kind of divine deliverance. Some kind of judgment on the enemies of God's people so that God's people are freed to be the true Israel of God.

Whatever Revelation is about, it's something like that. That is a lot like these other events that are echoed in its imagery. Another interesting historical setting that is echoed in one place in Revelation is the life and ministry of Jesus.

That is in the story of the two witnesses. I believe the two witnesses are symbolic. Although I have met the literal two witnesses many times.

In 43 years, as much as I travel, you can't help but meet the two witnesses here and there. I was picked up by two hitchhikers once that informed me they were the two witnesses. They were hippies.

I think they had been smoking dope and they had read the book of Revelation. It was revealed to them that they were the two witnesses. I've had others.

Recently, Enoch wrote to me. No, it was Elijah, excuse me, emailed me. In all sobriety, he said he was soon going to meet up with Enoch and they were going to go to Jerusalem and they were the two witnesses.

You know, not all Christians are sane. If you circulate in as many Christian circles as I do, you'll run into them, the two witnesses. However, in my opinion, the two witnesses are not literally two people.

The two witnesses are symbolic like many other things in the book of Revelation are. And the imagery by which they are symbolically depicted is deliberately borrowed from the actual historical life of Christ. Just like some of the images of plagues are borrowed from the historical exodus or the historical fall of Babylon is alluded to, so the historical life of Jesus provides the pattern for the symbolic description of the two witnesses.

They minister for three and a half years like Jesus. Their ministry is miraculous like Jesus. They are persecuted at the end of time like Jesus and put to death like Jesus in the town where Jesus was.

The city where Jesus was crucified was specifically told in chapter 11, verse 8. Then they are dead for three days and then they get up again and ascend into heaven like Jesus. Now, I don't believe those events literally are to happen with some group of witnesses in the future. Forgive me if you disagree, but my own studies of the book of Revelation have convinced me that this too, like the rest of the book, is very symbolic.

But what I can recognize is the two witnesses, whoever they represent, and I do have a pretty firm opinion about that, which you'll have to wait until chapter 11 to find out about, but the two witnesses are likened to Jesus, obviously. And the imagery of the three and a half year ministry, the death, the resurrection, the ascension after three days, these images are borrowed from the actual historical life of Christ and applied symbolically to the career of whoever the two witnesses may be. We are going to, in the course of this introduction, before we actually start going through chapter 1, 2, and 3 and so forth, we're going to talk about the four views of Revelation, the four approaches.

You might be aware that some years ago I wrote a book that's called Revelation Four Views. In that book I do not reveal my preferred view. I simply present four views side by side, as objectively as I know how, and judging from the Amazon.com reviews, it sounds like most people feel that I have succeeded in concealing my own view pretty well, not perfectly.

You can certainly tell from reading my book which view I don't believe is correct. But which view I do believe is correct is not that easy to discern because my own view is kind of a mixture. But the truth is there are four distinct approaches and I come to the book of Revelation without a preference about it.

But as objectively as a person can, I don't have anything at stake. Now, if I had written a book about Revelation defending one of the views, I'd have pressure to defend that view. I actually thought, after I wrote the book, I thought maybe I'll write an appendix saying what I believe.

I thought, nah, better not do that. After all, I've changed my view three times in my teaching career. What if I do it again? I don't want to go on record as believing a certain thing and then change my view and wish I'd never published.

I've often thought, what if Hal Lindsay would change his mind today? Forty million people have read his view. He's made fun of every other view than his own, insisted that it's correct, written book after book, made millions of dollars on it, and then imagine he began to think, wait a minute, maybe this one isn't right. Can't even entertain those thoughts.

I'd rather remain free to think and therefore not go on record, at least in print, about my view. But I'll tell you what my view is when we teach through. But the point is, I really don't have a dog in this race.

It's not like I have some commitment or agenda to defend a particular view. But I have reached conclusions that convince me. And yet I want people to know what all the views are and why they are believed.

I want to actually give you the strengths of each view for you to assess and what I consider to be the drawbacks of each view for you to assess. And then you can make up your own mind. And that's what we'll do in the course of this introduction before we're done.

But it'll be in our next session tomorrow night that we'll actually survey those views and actually

weigh the strengths and weaknesses of each view.

OpenTheo

Revelation Introduction (Part 3) - Dating Revelation

Revelation - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explains in this talk that while many scholars believe that the Book of Revelation was written in 96 AD, some hold opposing views. The internal evidence suggests that the book was written during the reign of Nero, leading to him being a convincing candidate for the number 666. However, it is not necessary to know the exact date of writing to understand the fundamental message of the book. The point is to look at the scriptures and study the teachings of Jesus.

Transcript

Tonight I want to say that one of the views, at least, is that Revelation is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. That view is called the Preterist view. That's only one of the four, but it is one of the views.

Now the reason I say that is because we have to consider the date that Revelation was written. And most modern commentators, most modern study Bibles, if they give introductions to the book of Revelation, they say Revelation was written near the end of the reign of Domitian, around 96 AD. That is the majority view among scholars these days.

That Revelation was written about 96 AD. Now it takes only a moment's reflection to realize that this rules out at least one of the four views of Revelation. The one that says Revelation was writing predicting the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

How could it be that an author writing 25 years after that event would write a book predicting it? Of course, one might say, well, it's written after the event, pretending to be written before. But that book doesn't belong in the Bible, though. I believe that Revelation is a genuine prophecy predicting something.

Therefore, it must have been written before that something. Now, if it was AD 70, then the book would have to be written before AD 70. And therefore, the popular view that Revelation was written in 96 AD would rule out the preterist view.

And it would leave the other views still standing. In fact, the other three views really are not

vulnerable on the matter of the date. The book of Revelation could be written in the year 50 AD or the year 100 AD, and it would make no impact on the futurist view, the historicist view, or the idealist view.

The date of writing is irrelevant to them. But to the preterist view, the date of writing is all important. Because whatever the view may have in its favor, it has one fatal flaw.

If the book was written after 70 AD, the view goes down the toilet. It doesn't belong even under consideration. It requires a pre-70 AD date.

Now, I said the majority of scholars today believe that the book was written in 96 AD. But not all scholars. There are excellent scholars of the highest rank who also hold that the book was written in the reign of Nero.

Nero committed suicide in 68 AD. So if it was written during his reign, it was written in or before 68 BC, which places it before 70. So the preterist view has a vested interest in an early date, a Neroian date.

The idea that Nero was the emperor at the time of writing is very important to somebody who believes that the preterist view is correct. Now, without talking about the merits of the preterist view or other views at this time, and we'll save that for another lecture, let me talk about the evidence for when the date was of the writing. And while I would say, as I did, that the majority of modern scholars think the later date, 96, the reign of Domitian, is the correct date, in the 19th century, the majority of evangelical scholars thought it was written during the reign of Nero.

The opinion has shifted, but not because of new evidence. It's just that new arguments become popular, and the scholarly world shifts its favorite views from time to time, just because some favorite son of the academy has written a theory that sounds good, and they follow that for a while. Almost all scholars, and I say this as one who's read 50 commentaries on Revelation and can see the trends, almost all scholars are lemmings.

A few are not. A few scholars are innovative. A few scholars think for themselves and outside the box.

And every once in a while, a scholar comes up with a new idea that everyone else isn't saying. And if it's clever enough, then the lemmings all start following him, and follow him for maybe decades, maybe centuries, and then another thinking scholar arises, and the lemmings all follow him. And so, you have to realize that just because the majority of scholars think any given thing, it's not an argument for it being true.

It's an argument for it being the current vogue, the current academic fad. Now, academic fads can be valid or not. That's why they shift as new arguments arise.

So, just so we'll put this in perspective, in the 1900s, most evangelical scholars thought the

book was written in the reign of Nero, the earlier date. In the 20th century, I said in the 1800s, in the 19th century, that was the main view. The 20th century, most shifted to believe it was in the reign of Domitian.

But why? What are the evidences? Now, that's what I want to talk about in the remaining few minutes I have. What evidence is there to point to one date or another? Now, there are evidences for both. It's not like it's a slam dunk for one or the other date.

What we really have is a tension between the weight of external evidence on the one hand, and the weight of internal evidence on the other. Now, what I mean by that, when scholars talk about a book of the Bible, and let's say it's authorship or it's date or some objective data about a book, they say there's internal evidence and external evidence. What they mean is, inside the book, there are statements that give us clues, that might help us answer the question.

That's internal evidence. The author himself is giving us the data. But there's also external evidence, which means what the early church thought about it.

What was their opinion? What did Tertullian think? What did Irenaeus think? What did Justin Martyr think? What did Hippolytus think? What did the early church think? The testimony of the early church, the first people to actually possess the book from the hands of the author, who did they think wrote it? You'd think they would know. After all, they received it from them. Unless it came in a plain brown package by post without a return address, they would probably know where they got it from, who wrote it.

Therefore, the testimony of church fathers is also considerable evidence, but it's external. The church fathers were not inside the book. They're outside the book.

So their testimony is evidence that's external to the book itself. Internal evidence is drawn from what's in the book itself. Evangelicals, I think, should be committed to the belief that internal evidence should trump external evidence.

Why? Because the book's inspired. Whatever the book itself tells us should be more important than what anyone outside the book may have thought about it. The opinions of any group of men are not as authoritative as God's own testimony.

And therefore, the internal evidence for a biblical book weighs more than external evidence. Now, I'm going to give you details, but just to summarize it, in general, the internal evidence of Revelation, I believe, supports the early date. The external evidence seems to support the later date.

So the scholarly vogues about which is the better date depend very largely on what do we prefer, internal or external evidence. That is to say, I think the evidence within the book would, in general, on balance, point to a date of writing during the reign of Nero. But the testimony of the Church Fathers generally place it in the reign of Domitian, 25 or so years later.

Now, those who take the late date also point to internal evidence. But to my mind, it's all very weak. They've got a pretty strong case, external evidence, for the late date.

But the internal evidence they point to for the late date is not very strong, in my opinion. Let's look at it. First of all, what evidence is there for a date during the time of Nero? Among those scholars who are alive today, or who have been alive in recent times and are highly recognized as authoritative, who hold the early date would include J. Adams, Adam Clark's commentary is not exactly contemporary, Alfred Edersheim's about a century ago, although Alfred Edersheim was a Jewish Christian living in Palestine who wrote the Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah, and an equally large volume on the Old Testament history.

A pretty respected scholar, J.B. Lightfoot, John A.T. Robinson, Philip Schaft, the great church historian from Switzerland, and many others have held or do hold to the early date. A very long list can be given. Most of the names I did not include because you wouldn't have heard of them.

I'm not sure you've heard of the ones I gave, but I have. Some of the names on the list I don't know much about. But these are reputable scholars of high rank, and they are convinced of the early date.

Now you can also find a long list of scholars who believe the late date. We're not going to count noses here. I just want you to know there are reputable scholars today who believe both views.

What arguments can be given for the early date? One is chapter 17, verses 9 and 10. Revelation 17, verses 9 and 10. I made reference to this before, and it is indeed an obscure statement, possible of being interpreted more than one way.

That is, there's more than one option in interpreting this statement. But in Revelation 17, verses 9 and 10, when the beast that the woman is riding on is being described by the angel, it says, Here is a mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.

There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes he must continue a short time, and the beast that was and is and is not is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.

This is that passage I quoted saying, that's the clarifying of the vision. It's obviously very obscure. But the reference to seven kings has often been seized upon as a help to knowing when the book was written.

Because it says, five kings have fallen, one now is. Now on the assumption, and a great number of scholars assume, that John means by kings, emperors. John wrote this during the Roman, of course, the Roman Empire's ascendancy.

And so they say he's talking about Roman emperors. Five Roman emperors had fallen at the time he was writing. But at the time he was writing, the sixth Roman emperor was seated, was

reigning.

Nero was the sixth of the Roman emperors. And so some feel that John is telling us here, that he was writing during the reign of Nero. Now it'd be nice if that was a slam dunk, it is not.

One of the problems with it is, it's assuming that the kings are emperors. In fact, in Daniel, kings are empires. And John may be using it the same way.

He may be saying not five emperors, but maybe five empires have risen and fallen. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media Persia, Greece, Rome. Rome's the sixth.

So this becomes ambiguous evidence. But on the assumption that he's talking about emperors, he would be identifying Nero as the sitting emperor at the time. What else do we have? Chapter 11, verses 1 and 2. Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod, and the angel stood saying, Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and the house of worship there.

But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles, and they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. Now, what is going on here is, he's told to measure a portion of the temple. The actual word temple there in the Greek is neos.

It's the Greek word for the holy of holies. He's supposed to measure the holy of holies, but the rest of the temple he's not supposed to measure. Why? Well, he's told the rest of the temple is given to the Gentiles, they're going to tread it underfoot.

Now, that would suggest the part of the temple he's measuring is to be preserved, inviolate. But the rest of the temple is going to be given over to the Gentiles, strongly suggesting that the temple is going to be at least the outward temple is going to be trampled underfoot, going to be destroyed. It sounds as if the temple here is still standing, and he's measuring it.

If the temple indeed was still standing when he wrote this, it was before 70 A.D., because the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. And this seems to be predicting the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. It may be saying something else, and therefore people don't all agree on the importance of this particular information. To my mind, this is pretty important, because it does sound like the temple is still standing at the time he's writing, so that he can go and measure it and so forth. Though, of course, the thing did happen in a vision, and a vision may include features that are not historically contemporary, and therefore it doesn't prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the temple was really standing at the time.

But it does give that impression. To my mind, that's the first impression we receive. It is not something that cannot be challenged.

Then, we have the situation between the church and the Jewish community. Two of the churches that are mentioned, the Church of Smyrna and the Church of Philadelphia, seem to be persecuted by the Jewish population in their town. Jesus speaks to them to encourage the

church that he knows these Jews, who claim they're Jews.

He said they're not really Jews, they're really the synagogue of Satan, but he said he's going to humble them. He's going to make them come bowing to them and acknowledging that he loves them. But the point here is that these churches, these Christians, are being persecuted by Jews.

Though this is not a solid proof, there is serious doubt that the Jewish community would be of a mind to persecute anybody after their temple had been destroyed, after their commonwealth had been judged, when they've been scattered like sheep throughout the empire. They would be, of course, existing in the cities where the church was, but greatly demoralized, one would think. Not really that cocky.

Not in a position to feel their oats to the point where they feel like they can pick on another group of people in town. It seems, although this is not proof positive, it seems like the Jewish people in those towns are not in the mood one would expect them to be if the temple had been destroyed and their nation had been humiliated and judged. They seem to be a little too self-confident and considering themselves to be more or less in power.

Now, maybe the most interesting evidence is the number 666, which, of course, everybody speculates about. In the final verse of chapter 13, it says in verse 18, Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast.

For it is the number of a man. His number is 666. And all scholars have pretty much agreed that this is referring to the numeric equivalent of the letters of the man's name.

The names, as I'm sure most of you know, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin are all languages where the letters of the alphabet double for numerals. We're very familiar with that in Latin. We have the Roman numeral system.

X is 10, V is 5, and so forth. It's the Roman alphabet, also is numbers. Same is true in Greek and Hebrew.

That means that any word and any name in these languages could be, you could add up the numerical value of the letters in it and total it up. This, in fact, was done from time to time. Popularly.

Scholars have found graffiti from ancient Rome where somebody said, 387 is in love with 294. It's like they've taken their names and they've given numerical equivalents to make them rather difficult to decipher. John says, this number, the beast, is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

Now, most Christians, and it doesn't matter what their view of Revelation is, this is true of almost all of them, believe that this is somebody's name. Now, it's interesting that John felt that the wise among his original readers could figure out who it was. Which means it was someone then living, not someone who's going to be born 2,000 years later.

How could John possibly hope for even the wisest among them to calculate the name of the beast if he wasn't going to be born for another 2,000 years? He's writing to people who were really alive at the time and saying, those among you who have wisdom, figure this out. I think you can do it. Calculate the number of the beast and you'll know who I'm talking about.

His number is 666. Obviously a contemporary person in John's day. But who? Well, if we, you know, don't restrict it to people in John's day, all kinds of suggestions come up.

People thought it was Mussolini. Some thought it was Henry Kissinger. Some people thought it was Ronald Reagan.

Some people have all different ideas about who it is. Some people think it's King Ferdinand of Spain. All kinds of ideas have been floated.

And innovative ways of calculating the number 666 from their actual name. Like Ronald Reagan, I don't remember what his middle name is, but all his first, middle, and last name all have six letters. Wilson.

Wilson. Okay. Ronald Wilson Reagan.

666. I actually heard people suggest that. Well, first of all, 666 isn't what it is.

It's 666. Only in English letters does that look like 666. The number 666 is what it is.

It's not three sixes. But anyway, it has been pointed out by those who hold to the early date that Caesar Nero, his name translated into Hebrew, and the letters value calculated comes out to 666. Now, of course, that may be true of many people, but it's not true of very many people who are candidates for emperor in the time of the writing of Revelation.

It's not true, for example, of Domitian, or of any other emperor, or of any other known figure from that period that can easily be identified. Irenaeus, who lived a century following, believed that the word meant Latinus, which he said, the word Latinus means the Roman. And he thought since the word Latinus totals up to 666, he thought that was a good guess.

But it's not the number of a nationality. It's the number of a man. And the only known man whose name can be calculated that way in that period would be Caesar Nero.

Now, some of you might say, but wait, you said in Hebrew. Why in the world would we have to transfer his name into Hebrew to get the number? Well, the argument goes the purpose for giving his name in symbolism is so the Romans, if they happened to find the book, would not recognize that it's a reference to the emperor, and not a very flattering one at that. And therefore, since the Romans would know Greek and Latin, using those languages would not be safe.

Using Hebrew would be. The Romans would hardly know Hebrew. And so, yet the readers would perhaps know it.

There are Hebrew words in the book of Revelation. Though it's written in Greek, it's got a number of Hebrew words. Armageddon is a Hebrew word.

Alleluia is a Hebrew word. The angel of the bottomless pit, his name is given in Greek and in Hebrew. Apollyon and the other one, Abaddon.

And so, Apollyon is Greek, but Abaddon is Hebrew. Same word in both languages. So the readers are expected to know something of Hebrew, but the outsiders in the Roman Empire might not be expected to, and therefore, Caesar Nero becomes an interesting, some would say a convincing candidate for it to be the number 666.

So these suggestions are internal evidence that point that direction. They don't prove it, but they can be seen to suggest it, although every one of those evidences could be interpreted differently. But this is true also of the evidences for a late date.

Only the ones for a late date, the internal evidences are weak in the extreme. For example, those who believe in the late days say, well, chapter 13 describes emperor worship, and emperor worship wasn't really an issue until the time of Domitian. Therefore, it must have been written during the time of Domitian because it describes emperor worship.

Well, this might be an interesting argument if we don't believe in predictive prophecy. In other words, if John can only write about things that are already happening in his time, then maybe so. On the other hand, if he can prophesy, he might even write about the time of Domitian, decades before the time of Domitian.

It's not impossible. Isaiah wrote about Cyrus and even named him 200 years before the man did the things predicted, 150 years before he was born. John could predict things that happened in the reign of Domitian if he wished without him living in that time.

Even if we agreed, and I do not, that Revelation 13 is describing Domitian's persecution of the Christians and requiring people to worship him, that would tell us nothing about when it was written unless we rule out predictive prophecy as a possibility. Because in the reign of Nero, a prophet could predict things in the reign of Domitian, so it wouldn't tell us anything about when it was written. Likewise, the extent of the persecution.

They say in the reign of Nero, the persecution didn't extend that far. Nero just persecuted Christians in Rome, but these Christians were in Asia Minor. Only Domitian had an empire-wide persecution, so it must be the reign of Domitian.

Well, again, not a strong argument since the book of Revelation doesn't make any reference to an empire-wide persecution. The seven churches are not told that they were subjected to an empire-wide persecution. Smyrna and Philadelphia were subjected to persecution from the Jewish community in their towns.

The church of Pergamum seemed to be persecuted by the local Roman authorities in the town.

Several of the churches didn't seem to be persecuted at all. There's no evidence in Revelation that there was an empire-wide persecution going on, so even if it's true that Domitian was first to bring about one, it's irrelevant.

The book of Revelation does not discuss one. Okay? How about this? The Nero redidivus myth. What is that? It is known that among the Roman people after Nero died, a myth, a rumor, circulated that Nero wasn't really dead.

He was very much hated and feared by the Romans, and they could hardly believe he was dead. It was almost too good to be true. So many of them said, sort of like they said about John F. Kennedy, he's not really dead.

They're keeping him on ice. He's going to come back and be the beast. He had a mortal head wound, but it's going to be healed.

Maybe you never heard that stuff. If so, you weren't talking to people about Bible prophecy in the late 60s. But that's what they said about Nero.

He's not really dead. He's going to come back, and we'll all be in trouble. And you see the beast in Revelation has a head wound, a mortal head wound, that heals.

And many people say, well, what that means is the beast was assassinated or killed, but in the imagery of the Revelation, he comes back. And this is the most amazingly, I was going to say inane, but I don't want to be too insulting, stupid. This is the most amazingly stupid argument.

Imagine an evangelical giving. Now, if a person is not evangelical, they can come up with any arguments they want. But a person who believes in the inspiration of Scripture, what they say is the Revelation and talk about the head wound of the beast that's healed is alluding to the Nero redidivus myth, that is the myth that was circulating in Rome that Nero was going to come back from the dead.

Huh? And then they say, then they say Domitian was referred to by the Latin poets as the second Nero or sometimes the bald Nero. But the point is that when Domitian came along, he was enough like Nero that people likened him to Nero. And so they're saying, you see, the beast is Domitian and he's likened to Nero who's died and is now back according to the mythology of the Romans.

Then are we being told that John is affirming this mythology, that John is affirming that Domitian is in fact a return of Nero from the dead? If not, then the argument makes no sense at all. I don't think so. In fact, in Revelation, the beast never dies.

He has a mortal head wound in one of his seven heads. The other six are perfectly healthy. If you have seven heads and one of them dies, that doesn't kill you unless infection sets in.

But the truth is the beast lived on. It specifically says the beast had a mortal head wound but

lived on. It didn't die.

There's no assassination of a man who dies and then comes back. That's the left-behind novels that have that. That's dispensational fairy tales, frankly, that say that there's going to be a world dictator who's going to be assassinated and he's going to come back.

Revelation doesn't say anything like that. There's no mention of the beast dying or coming back. It's just that the beast survives despite one of his seven heads being killed.

Now, what that means, we'll have to discuss another time. But it certainly doesn't mean that John is referring to the Nero redid of his myth as if he's referring to Domitian and the popular notion that Domitian was the second Nero. I'm not going there.

I'm not going to buy that. But here's probably the argument that is given most often. I realize I've gone later than I wanted to, but I'm in the middle of something.

If you have to leave, go. But they say the state of the seven churches as witnessed in the seven letters of the seven churches is not that which would fit the time of Nero. It seems that that was later.

Why? There's a couple of things they say. They say, first of all, the wealth of Laodicea. Laodicea says, I have need of nothing.

I'm rich, I'm powerful, and so forth. And they say, you know, just a few years before 70 AD, there was a devastating earthquake that we know devastated the city of Laodicea. The city was almost leveled to the ground.

And it was like in the early 60s. So, just before 70 AD, the city would not have recovered to the point to be talking about being wealthy. Well, how do we know that? I mean, if the city was destroyed in 63 AD, who's to say it wasn't sufficiently rebuilt for people to be talking about their wealth again by, say, 67 or 68, five years later.

Maybe the city wasn't rebuilt. Revelation doesn't say the city was fully rebuilt. It just says the attitude of the people is that they are wealthy and have need of nothing.

It might even be not talking about physical wealth. They might be thinking about their spiritual wealth. They might be boasting about their spirituality.

It's hard to know. But in any case, the argument doesn't prove anything. But then we have the interesting argument that the Church of Smyrna, which is addressed in the second letter in Revelation 2, didn't exist in the time of Paul.

Now, Paul died probably around 67 AD. And therefore, they say if the Church of Smyrna did not exist in the time of Paul, that means it didn't exist in 67 AD. It could hardly be thought to become a church in the next couple of years and have received a letter like this.

Well, first of all, I'd say that doesn't make sense. What if that is even true, that the Church didn't exist until 67 AD? Couldn't it come into existence in 68 AD or 69 and still be before 70 AD? It seems like 68 and 69 are still years before 70 AD and are years as good as any other for the Church to come into existence. But the very suggestion that the Church of Smyrna didn't exist in the time of Paul is a misnomer.

It's based on a misreading of the letter of Polycarp to the Church of Philippi. Polycarp, who was later a bishop of Smyrna, this very church. In the early second century, Polycarp was the bishop of the Church of Smyrna.

And he wrote a letter at that time to the Philippian church, the same church Paul had written Philippians to. But of course, much, much later, Polycarp's writing to them. And when Polycarp writes to the Church of Philippi, he says this to them.

He said, Among you, the blessed Paul labored, who are praised in the beginning of his epistle, meaning the epistle to the Philippians that we have in our Bible. For concerning you, he boasts in all the churches who then alone had known the Lord, for we had not yet known him. We, presumably meaning the Church of Smyrna, had not yet known the Lord.

Meaning, presumably, the gospel had not yet come to Smyrna, and the people of Smyrna didn't know Jesus yet. When? In the lifetime of Paul? That's not what he says. When Paul wrote to the Philippians.

That was not at the end of Paul's life. It was near the end. But Paul wrote to the Philippians when he came to Rome after 60 AD.

Could have been 61, 62 AD. We don't know the exact date. But in all likelihood, it was in the early 60s that Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians.

That is the time when Polycarp says the Church of Smyrna did not yet exist when Paul wrote to the Philippians. That's the time he's talking about. Not Paul's lifetime as a whole, but when Paul wrote to the Philippians, we did not yet know the Lord, he said.

But certainly, that gives almost a decade for the Church to come into existence before Revelation. But a church doesn't need a decade to come into existence in order to exist, by the way. Now, there's another thing too, and that is that the letters to the churches testified to a spiritual decline in some of the churches.

Ephesus had left their first love. Sardis had a name that it lived, but was now dead. And of course, Laodicea was blind, naked, you know, pitiful, miserable, poor.

That is backslidden. It was lukewarm, basically. Laodicea was lukewarm.

So, we've got Ephesus has left their first love, Laodicea has gone lukewarm, and Sardis has lost any real life. It only has a reputation for life. They say that takes some time for churches to get

that bad.

And these churches were founded during Paul's second missionary journey when he was in Asia, which was in the late 50s. So, they say 10 years, you know, which if Revelation was written to them before 70 A.D., we're talking about maybe only within 10 years after they were founded. 10 years is not long enough for a church to go lukewarm.

Everyone's laughing. Why? Because that's a stupid argument. How long does it take a church to go lukewarm? Depends.

15 minutes? How long did it take the Galatian churches to depart from the gospel and embrace a different gospel? Paul had barely left town. Paul walked away from Galatia and got back home to Antioch and had to write to the Galatians that they'd left the faith and had fallen from grace. And he'd just been there weeks earlier.

He founded the church and came home and they were already gone. What about the Corinthian church? Well, within Paul's lifetime, you know, they were denying the resurrection of the dead. They were allowing people to live in incest.

I mean, what kind of, how long does it take for a church to go bad? Depends on the church. I've seen them go bad faster than 10 years, I'll tell you that. I've seen a whole revival go bad in three or four years.

You know, so I mean, this argument that the churches, they've gone lukewarm, some of them, can't happen within 10 years, so it must not be an early date of writing. The argument makes no sense to me. But I'll give you the last argument and then we'll be done.

I'll release you. I do believe I've gone too long, but I can't stop now. These internal evidences of the late date are not, to my mind, convincing or valid at all.

Now I realize the internal evidences for the early date are not compelling, but they are better. The internal evidence for the early date, to my mind, is better than the internal evidence for the late date. But the real strong evidence for the late date is the external evidence.

And that is the testimony of Irenaeus. Now Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp. Polycarp was a disciple of John.

John wrote the book of Revelation. Irenaeus was removed from the author of Revelation by only one generation, or two, depending on how you figure it. Polycarp, Irenaeus.

Now Irenaeus said something that has become the basis of the belief that John wrote this during the reign of Domitian. And Irenaeus' words are given here in your notes at the bottom of page 5. This is what he said. And this is the basis for the late date of Revelation being a champion.

Here's what Irenaeus said. He's talking about the subject of the mark of the beast. Okay, that's

the subject he's writing about.

He says, Now since this is so, and since this number, 666, is found in all the good and ancient copies, that is the good and ancient copies of Revelation, and since those who have seen John face to face testify, and reason teaches us that the number of the name of the beast appears according to the numeration of the Greeks by the letters in it, his assumption, we will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist. For if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in the present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision, meaning John. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, toward the end of Domitian's reign.

Now you see, that statement, that was seen almost in our own day, not so long ago, in the end of Domitian's reign. What was seen? Well, in the previous sentence, it talks about him who saw the heavenly vision. That was seen in the reign of Domitian.

What was seen, the vision or the guy who saw it? Notice earlier in the paragraph, he says, those who saw John testify. There is reference to John being seen, but there is also reference to John seeing the heavenly vision. And there is ambiguity in the statement, that was seen.

What that? John or the vision? Now, almost all scholars who take the late date, all of them, believe it is saying that John saw the vision on the island of Patmos during the late reign of Domitian. However, good arguments can be raised against that meaning of Irenaeus' words. First of all, Irenaeus said that Domitian's reign was not very long before his time, almost in his own day, in his opinion.

Yet, he speaks of very ancient copies of the book of Revelation. The good and ancient copies of the book all testify to this number 666. Wait a minute.

If it was written in the reign of Domitian, which you are saying was almost in your own day, not very long ago, how could there be ancient copies? Presumably, the originals are more ancient than the copies. How could many of the copies of the book, already a second generation of the book, is now also ancient? Now, it certainly sounds like he is saying the book is old, but Domitian's reign was not so long ago. This would argue more that he is saying John was seen during the reign of Domitian.

That is, the last time anyone saw him or talked to him was that recently, but not telling us when he saw the vision. The book, after all, is very ancient and has ancient even copies of the original. So, it sounds like he is not saying that the book of Revelation was written or the vision seen in the reign of Domitian, but John was.

Not all would agree with this. Of course, this is a great debate. But, the argument he is making is we do not have to speculate about who the Antichrist is.

Why? Because, first of all, the name is not given in any of the copies of the book. Secondly, many people have seen John and he did not tell them the name. And, if it was important for us

to know, he would have told us.

In other words, the emphasis is on the fact that some people have seen John and he said nothing about it. And, for him to say, for that was seen not so very long ago, meaning that man was seen not very long ago in the reign of Domitian, would say, there are people I know or people you know who knew people who saw John. And, they say he never said anything about this.

Never told us the name. Now, I am not saying that the way I have just described Irenaeus' words are the necessary way to understand them. But, they are an alternative way to understand them.

It seems to me not unreasonable to suggest that Irenaeus is saying that John was last seen alive in the reign of Domitian. But, does not tell us when John was on Patmos or when he saw the vision. But, suggests that in his day the book was very ancient.

Even the copies of the book were ancient. And, the copies would come up and would be the second generation of the book. Now, let's say this.

Suppose Irenaeus actually did mean that the book of Revelation was written during the reign of Domitian. How much can we trust Irenaeus? Hard to say. He also said that Jesus lived to be about 50 years old before he was crucified.

That was something Irenaeus says. Jesus lived to be about 50. There's not a living scholar I've ever encountered that would think that Irenaeus was right about that.

The evidence of Scripture is that Jesus lived to be only in his 30's, not 50. So, Irenaeus might not be the most reliable witness on historical data anyway. So, even if he did say that John saw the vision in the reign of Domitian, he could be wrong about that as he is about some other things more fundamental, like Jesus.

So, the external evidence from Irenaeus, which by the way was quoted and followed by later church fathers as if it was valid. Later church fathers also said Domitian was the emperor at the time, but seemingly followed Irenaeus on this. They may have misunderstood him or they may have understood him and he was wrong.

Or he might be right, but the point is, it's merely a man's statement as opposed to the internal evidence of the book, which to my mind, the temple seems to be standing. The man, 666, the best candidate I know is Nero. There may be a better one that we don't know about.

But, we have to leave the matter undecided about the date. And that's okay with me. I don't really care if we can settle the question or not.

The main thing is, if the question is unsettled, then the preterist view remains still a possibility. If the matter is settled in favor of the late date, then preterism can't be considered a possibility.

If the late date is proved or even still in the running, then preterism is a possibility and should be considered alongside other views.

I personally lean toward preterism in most parts of the book of Revelation. I'm not fully preterist in the book of Revelation. I have some parts.

I don't take the preterist view, but for the most part, I lean toward that. I do believe the main theme of the book of Revelation is going to be the fall of Jerusalem. And I believe, therefore, the book was written before 70 AD.

I can't prove it, nor do I feel the need to. The fact is, it can't be disproven, and therefore, the question can be decided on questions other than the date, but rather the evidence from the rest of Scripture as to what is under discussion in the book. And that is not as difficult as one might think when you begin to compare the Scriptures with Scripture.

Remember how many times Revelation alludes to Old Testament Scriptures. Looking at those Scriptures can tell us something, and that's what we're going to have to do as we study the book. But I do want to acquaint you with all four views and their strengths and weaknesses, which we will do in our next lecture.

OpenTheo

Revelation Introduction (Part 4) - Four Views

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the different views on interpreting the book of Revelation, focusing on the idealist, preterist, and historicist viewpoints. He cautions against taking things too literally and emphasizes the symbolic nature of the book. Gregg argues that each view has its own convincing arguments and encourages a thorough exegesis of each passage in order to gain a better understanding of the principles that can be applied to life.

Transcript

Introduction to the book of Revelation We've talked about the authorship, we've talked about the genre of literature that it is, we've talked about the symbolism in the book, we've talked about the debate over the date of revelation, and we've talked about how to interpret the book. Now, having referred to one position, the preterist position, I just give that as an example, but there are four different approaches to the book of Revelation. And these are entirely different from one another.

It's like they almost have no overlap in terms of their thought about interpretation. It's possible that you have heard various teachers on Revelation give various viewpoints on it, but all of them from the futurist viewpoint. So that some would think that the rapture occurs at the beginning of revelation, some think it happens at the end of revelation.

There are some who put the rapture in chapter 4, some put the rapture in chapter 19. Some place it in the middle, around chapter 11, or maybe 12. And so, in hearing these different views, if you happen to have heard them, you might say, wow, there's sure a lot of disagreement about the book of Revelation.

Well, you haven't heard the least of it yet. Because those who place the rapture in Revelation 4, and those who place it in chapter 19, are much closer to each other in their interpretation of Revelation than either of them are to any of the other three views. Because those who place the rapture anywhere in Revelation are taking, in that case, generally speaking, a futurist view.

Or, in some cases, an idealist view. But, I'm assuming that if you are like me, and like 90% or more of American evangelicals, you probably have heard the futurist view of Revelation, and

perhaps no other. In fact, it may be that you never had any reason to think there was any other kind of view.

What is the futurist view? It is the view that Revelation is talking about the future. Now, if you had told me that sometime in the first eight years of my ministry, if you had said, well, the futurist view is the view that Revelation is talking about the future, I would say, well, duh. What else could it be talking about? You don't think that there's ever been a time in history, do you, when a bottomless pit was opened, and a swarm of locusts with scorpion tails afflicted the human race, do you? Obviously, that's future.

It never happened before, has it? How about the whole sea turning to blood? Clearly, that's never happened. That must be future. But, you see, the assumption I was making is that those things are literal.

And, if they are literal, then, of course, they must not have happened yet. It seems like we would have heard about it. And so, the idea that the book of Revelation is future rests on the idea that it is literal.

That's one reason we spent a whole session talking about the symbolism in the book, and pointing out that, although some people say, well, we have to take the book of Revelation literally, like the rest of Scripture, they don't really do so. They take literally what they want to take literally, and other things they don't. Nobody takes literally the beast being a real animal, or Jesus being a real lamb.

No one takes that literally. No one thinks Jesus is a lamb, or that the world will be ruled by an animal. And so, they would recognize symbolism there.

And so, what we really have to deal with is deciding how much of this is symbolic. And then, of course, once having made some assessments in that area, what do the symbols refer to? And how closely do they have to correspond with the events they're referring to? That is, do they have to be kind of like the event, or can they be just kind of have a distant connection in principle with whatever it's talking about? These kinds of decisions are not easy to make, and it makes it all the harder when you realize that it's not a given among biblical scholars that there's any particular time period that this is talking about. It's so much easier to be a futurist, because then you can just take anything literal that can't be taken literally.

And that's exactly, when I was a futurist, what I would have said. I would have said, if someone said, well, you don't take it all literally, I'd say, well, no, some things would be ridiculous to take them literally. But you take everything literally, unless it's absurd to take it literally.

But then, of course, one man's judgment of absurdity is different than another man's. And the older I get, the fewer things there are in the book of Revelation that I would find it possible to take literally without seeing an absurdity in it. When I was young, I believed everything I was told.

That's a good thing to do when you're young, but only while you're young. And then you need to do some thinking on your own. And my thinking led me far from my roots in the book of Revelation.

I taught the futurist view for the first eight years of my ministry. But near the end of that eight years, some of those final years, I was a little waffly. In fact, I'll tell you, I was, let's see, it was probably four years into my ministry that I began to see some problems with the futurist view.

I did not consider them to be fatal problems. They were just difficulties I couldn't resolve. Passages that didn't seem to fit.

Statements that didn't make an awful lot of sense from a futurist point of view. But I didn't know there was any other view out there. I truly did not believe any Christian had ever seen the book of Revelation otherwise than as a description of the end of the world.

But in spite of the fact that some of the things in the book of Revelation were hard to fit into that milieu, I just figured it certainly must be about the end of the world, but I can't understand how then these particular statements would fit. So the decision I made, and I consciously made this when I was, it was in 1974. I went into ministry in 70, so I was four years into it.

And I'd been a solid dispensationalist futurist, and I decided I can live the rest of my life without teaching the book of Revelation. After all, the church went four centuries without having it in the canon. It must be possible to be a good Christian without knowing what the book of Revelation is about or even having it in your Bible.

So I don't need to teach the book of Revelation. I just had concluded that I don't understand it, and I probably will not. I had understood it when I just mouthed what my teachers had said.

They seemed to understand everything. But some of the things that I repeated eventually didn't seem to fit with the text itself. And I became less and less confident in my viewpoint until I thought, okay, I really just don't know.

I didn't have anything to replace the futurist view with. I didn't know there were any other options, so I just thought, I just don't get it. But, so what? I had by this time in my ministry come to think that the most important thing for a Bible teacher to be concerned about is discipleship.

Making disciples. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever Jesus commanded. This is what we're told to teach.

And I thought, well, I can do that without teaching the book of Revelation. I assumed when I was 20 years old, or 21 years old, I assumed that I was done teaching the book of Revelation. And I thought, that's okay.

I don't need to teach it. It can be there, it can be sort of the black box of the Bible that I don't have to intrude into. We can get on just fine with the other 65 books.

And so I put Revelation out of my mind as much as I could. The problem was I kept reading the other 65 books. And as I mentioned in a previous lecture, the other 65 books are alluded to in the book of Revelation hundreds of times.

Which meant that as I read other books of the Bible, I'd come across passages that I remembered were in the book of Revelation. I remembered Revelation had said something like that. And it would make me curious.

For example, the first thing along these lines I came across as I was teaching in 1978 in a school in Santa Cruz, was a discipleship school I ran during the summer times there. 12 weeks long. You'd think 10 weeks.

Last summer was long. It was 12 weeks each summer I taught this. And I was teaching through the Bible as I am here.

Only much more. Like 6 hours a day. Because we tried to get through fast.

And besides, I didn't know much, so it didn't take long to get through the material. But I remember teaching in Matthew 12, Jesus' statement that he had bound the strong man. That is Satan.

He said no man can enter a strong man's house and spoil his goods unless he first binds the strong man. And then he can spoil his house. I knew the context.

I knew he was talking about casting demons out. He was spoiling or plundering Satan's house. And his affirmation was that I am doing what no one could possibly do unless they first bound Satan.

No one can go into Satan's house and do there what I'm doing here, unless he is first bound, incapacitated, the strong man. That is, bound Satan. And as I reflected on that, for the first time it occurred to me that Jesus said he had bound Satan.

And I thought, well, I remember something else about Satan being bound. Oh, yeah, that's in that difficult book. That's in Revelation, chapter 20.

But I thought, well, wait, Jesus is going to bind Satan at the beginning of the millennium when Jesus comes back. But in Matthew 12, he said he had already bound him. So I thought, Jesus bound Satan in his first coming, and he's going to bind him again at his second coming.

How did Satan get loose in between? This was my exact thinking. I thought, okay, he got bound back then. He'll be bound again when Jesus comes back.

What happened in between that he got loose and has to be bound again? Who let him loose? I wasn't being facetious. That was truly a crisis for me. And what I actually asked myself is, is it possible that Revelation 20 is talking about the same binding of Satan that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 12, 28? And that got me thinking very differently, because if so, that means Revelation

20 isn't talking about the second coming of Christ and the end of the world.

It might be talking about the first coming of Christ. And then, of course, that raised a lot of other questions. I won't go into detail now.

Maybe when we get to chapter 20, I'll go through it all with you. But the point is, I began to, I was trying to avoid Revelation. I was not interested in teaching Revelation.

I was reading other parts of the Bible, but I kept running into the material that's in the book of Revelation in other parts of the Bible. And it seemed to be, as I was, I guess, reading without any prejudices about the book of Revelation, perhaps, it was taking me back to look at the passages that cross-reference. And eventually, I found that I had made some sense out of one chapter.

And that was chapter 20, initially. Later, around 1982, 12 years into my ministry, when I first began teaching for YWAM, I was in Australia, actually, teaching in Brisbane. And in my free time, I was reading something like John.

And in John, chapter 12, in verse 31, Jesus said, Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out. He said, now will the ruler of this world, I had no doubt that was Satan, because Jesus used that phrase, the ruler of this world, three times. Every time meant Satan.

So, it says, now Satan's going to be cast out? And I thought, well, in Revelation 12, which, see, I couldn't get away from Revelation, because I knew it. I knew Revelation, I just didn't understand it. And so, I kept remembering things.

Revelation 12 has the dragon being cast out. But I thought that's supposed to happen in the middle of the tribulation. But Jesus said it was going to happen at the cross.

And so, this was really tweaking me, because I really had never heard anyone suggest anything about the Revelation, other than it was all about the end of the world. And the things I was seeing in cross-referencing were giving me a different picture. But I wasn't sure what that picture looked like.

It wasn't total, it was piece by piece. I think chapter 12 was the next chapter of Revelation that made some sense to me. Now, there were two out of 22 chapters that made sense to me.

The rest, I couldn't make any sense of at all. And I wasn't trying. And so, you know, my pastor, in my early years of ministry, had always said, just read through the Bible, don't get hung up on the parts you don't understand.

He said, if you come across something that just doesn't make sense to you, don't let that stop you in your pursuit through the Bible. He said, just take that little tidbit and put it back in the cupboard, and leave it for later, someday it will make sense to you. Well, I had been doing that,

especially with things about Bible prophecy.

Because what I did is what many Christians did. I assumed that Revelation was about the end of the world, and then I used it as a framework to set up a paradigm of the end of the world, and then fit what Paul and Jesus and Isaiah and Daniel said, into the framework that I had formed from the book of Revelation. In other words, I started with the most obscure book in the Bible to make my framework, and even scriptures that should have been more clear were made unclear, because I had to fit them into the framework.

I had to shoehorn them in there. But I was doing that less and less, of course, when I realized I can't use the book of Revelation, because I don't know what it's about. And so what happened was, I had more and more of these things I had to put back in the cupboard in my head.

I had this junk drawer in my brain that all these pieces that didn't fit the picture had to be thrown into. And so eventually, after several years, I had a lot of puzzle pieces in that drawer. Lots of things that just didn't fit the picture.

And I decided one day to take all the pieces out and look at them and see if they fit each other by any means. They didn't fit my picture, but they might fit together with each other. And as I began to look at these pieces again, in light of each other, I began to say, wait, there's a picture forming here.

You know, I was trying to make a jigsaw puzzle. I thought it was a Forrest Glenn picture, but it turned out it was a horse pasture. You know, it was something entirely different than what I thought.

I had this idea of what the picture of Revelation was about, but I had all these parts that didn't fit. But they fit each other. And I began to wonder, maybe my whole picture is wrong.

Maybe there's a different picture that everything does fit. And that intrigued me. And this was well into the 1980s now.

Over a decade after I'd gone into the ministry, I had already become an amillennialist. I didn't know that's what it was called, because no one else I knew had ever been one. I had, by my own thinking through and comparing scriptures to scriptures, I had become an amillennialist.

I later learned that's what it was called. And I later learned there were others. I didn't know there were others.

It scared me. I was quite convinced that I had become a heretic, and that I should not only not teach the book of Revelation, but I had better never say anything about the millennium again, because it would certainly, you know, brand me, and my ministry would be over. So I was keeping good and silent about the millennium for a while.

Of course, I'll just tell you, to make a long story short, I later found out that was not my own

view alone. It was the view of the whole church through most of history. So that made me feel a little better, and I felt like I could come out of the closet.

But I still was working on what Revelation is about. Revelation 20 I had no problems with. The other chapters presented difficulties.

Someone gave me a book called More Than Conquerors by William Hendrickson, a Dutch Reformed scholar. And he was amillennial, as I was, but more than that, he had an entirely different paradigm of Revelation. His view was what we call the idealist view.

I had never heard anything other than the futurist view, so this was intriguing. And the idealist view, as he presented it, was very well presented, very convincing, and fit perfectly the amillennial position I had already come to years earlier. So it felt right.

It felt like a fit. And so, for a little while, I started coming out and teaching on Revelation somewhat, but from the idealist point of view, which is, by the way, a very satisfying point of view. It's intellectually satisfying.

But I knew only two views, the futurist view and the idealist. And with those as the only options, I knew I was quite sure the idealist must be the right one, because the futurist had come to seem totally nonsensical to me, in view of other scripture. And so I was an idealist.

Somebody handed me a book back in 1982, I believe it was. Yes, it was. 1982 or 83.

Someone gave me a book by Jay Adams called The Time is at Hand. Now, Jay Adams is a Presbyterian author, amillennial. And he's not generally a teacher or a preacher or a writer about prophecy.

He's actually, he made his fame from writing about biblical counseling. In 1970, he published a book called Competent to Counsel, which was enormously successful and launched a movement in the evangelical church called the Newthetic Counseling Movement. John MacArthur's school, Master's Seminary, has a whole department of Newthetic Counseling.

Jay Adams was the father of Newthetic Counseling, which essentially was just counseling from scripture, is what it came down to, instead of psychology. But anyway, Jay Adams had written many books about counseling and was sort of the guru on that subject, but he'd written a small book on Revelation and the Olivet Discourse called The Time is at Hand. He was a preterist.

He believed that the first half of Revelation was describing the fall of Jerusalem. The first 12 chapters, he thought, or the first 11 chapters were about the fall of Jerusalem. He believed that the chapters 12 through 19 were about the fall of Rome.

And chapter 20, he took the same way I did, which was satisfying. But his preterism was radical to me. He was not idealist.

He was not futurist. He was saying Revelation had already been fulfilled in the past, an idea I

would never have considered some years earlier. But being an idealist had led me to take things in the book of Revelation non-literally.

When I actually was broke free from the literal idea, then I was open to think of other possible interpretations of the symbols, and preterism made some sense. He said that Jerusalem and Rome were the two enemies of the early church. The first persecutor of the church was Jerusalem.

The Sanhedrin had Jesus killed. Stone Stephen sent Saul out to persecute the church and then persecuted him when he became a Christian. The persecutor of the church in Smyrna seemed to be the Jewish community there.

The persecutor of the church in Philadelphia, also in Revelation, seems to be the Jewish community. Jews persecuted Christians in the early days. It's hard for us to imagine that because in later history, the church became politically powerful and persecuted Jews.

We think of the Jews having suffered a great deal under the church, and they have. But in the early days, the church didn't persecute anyone because they were Christians then. Christians don't persecute people.

Institutional churches do it as a habit, but Christians don't. The early Christians didn't persecute Jews. It was the Jews who persecuted the early Christians until about 70 AD.

After that, Rome became the real persecutor of the church. The emperors did. According to J. Adams, Revelation is showing God's dealings, God's intention to judge the two great persecutors of the early church, Jerusalem and Rome.

He felt that Babylon, who appears only in the second half of Revelation, is Rome. A good case can be made for that. You know, Peter, in 1 Peter 5, sends greetings from the church in Babylon.

Most tradition says he was in Rome, which means that he might have been using the word Babylon as a name for Rome. If Revelation used the word Babylon for Rome, that would be consistent with what Peter did. Anyway, this made some sense.

But I'll tell you, it was still a little far-fetched for me. It was so new, so radical. As I read his book, I thought, that's interesting, that's convincing, that makes sense.

But when I put the book down, I thought, nah. I don't think so. It was just too different.

And so I put it aside. I was glad to know it was there. I was glad to know what some of the arguments for the preterist view were.

But I remained not totally convinced. So I fell back on my default, which was at that time the idealist view. In the middle 80s, I was given a book called The Parousia by J. Stuart Russell.

He wrote it in the 1800s. It was so controversial, he felt, that he actually issued it anonymously. He published it, first of all, anonymously.

However, the first edition was very popular and well-received, so he later put out a second edition with his name on it and came out and identified himself. He was a full preterist. I didn't know that when I read his book.

I just knew that he was seeing 70 A.D. in lots of places I'd never seen it. And he made a very convincing case for the Olivet Discourse and much of Revelation, and some other passages, even in the Old Testament, as having been referring to 70 A.D. I didn't understand until later that he thought there was no future second coming of Christ, and that he believed all prophecy had been fulfilled in 70 A.D., which I consider to be an error. I don't believe that he's correct about that.

But I found myself agreeing with him about 50% of the time in his book. He took every instance in the Bible that uses the word parousia, which is the word coming, the coming of Christ. And he showed in each case that it referred to 70 A.D. Well, like I said, I agreed with him about half the time.

His reasoning was very good in about half the cases. The other half, I thought, it's a stretch. But I think mostly through reading his book, and then, of course, some other preterist books got in my hands, which, you know, what it really took was someone had to tell me what really happened in 70 A.D. I had never been taught in 30 years of being a Christian, 15 of which I'd been in the ministry, I'd never been told anything about what happened in 70 A.D. I vaguely knew that the Romans had destroyed Jerusalem sometime around that time, and that was all I knew.

I knew there was a guy named Josephus, who was a historian who'd written something, but I only knew that he'd made some references to Jesus and so forth that were helpful in Christian apologetics. I didn't really know much about Josephus' work. I didn't realize Josephus had participated in the Jewish War and wrote a history of it in detail.

And these preterist writers tended to quote Josephus a lot, and it was an eye-opener, because Josephus was not a Christian. He was a Jew, a witness of the Jewish War, and he had never certainly had a chance to see the Book of Revelation, but many of the historical paragraphs recalling things that happened in the Jewish War, they looked like they paralleled Revelation to an extremely close degree. And so I became fairly convinced that Revelation probably had a lot to do with 70 A.D. and the destruction of Jerusalem, so I became a partial preterist.

By this time, I had been three different things, a futurist, an idealist, and now a partial preterist. There is a fourth view. I have not become that, not yet.

That's the historicist view, and I don't think I will become that, but I thought, well, I'd better look into all the views. Now that I was aware there were a lot of views, I found out that the

Reformers, all the guys that the Protestants admire, like Luther and Zwingli and Calvin and all those Reformers, and Wycliffe and Huss, they were historicists. Their approach to the Revelation was historicist.

They were not futurists. They were not idealists. They were not preterists.

They were historicists. And so I thought I'd better look into that. I couldn't find any modern books on it, except those published by 70 A.D., and their interpretations were not impressive.

But some of the older commentaries, like Matthew Henry or Adam Clark, or some of the guys that I was very familiar with, but hadn't really read what they said about Revelation, Barnes notes on the New Testament. I had Barnes notes. These were about the most thorough commentator on the New Testament I could find, a Presbyterian.

These turned out to all be historicists. They were Protestant classic historicists, like the Reformers. And so I became acquainted with that, and realized they had a pretty good case too.

Not good enough for me, but pretty good. Now by this time I had become aware there were four different views of Revelation, the futurists, the idealists, the preterists, and the historicists. I also knew from experience that at least three of these could make a convincing case, or at least had convinced me at one time or another, and that the historicists, which had not convinced me, still had a pretty good case, enough to convince all Protestants for several centuries.

The historicist view, the one I've never held, and do not really anticipate holding, actually was called the Protestant view, because from the Reformation on, every Protestant scholar and preacher held to the historicist case until the 1800s, where there was a renewal of interest in the futurists. And so, I mean, what it comes down to is every one of these views has had some pretty impressive guys championing it, and every one of them felt they could make a strong case, strong enough to convince them, and many others, that their view is correct. But they were all mutually exclusive.

Well, maybe not. The idealist view could coexist with any of the other three, but the other three were definitely mutually exclusive. And this is very confusing, but since I had decided long ago I don't have to teach Revelation anymore, I had the luxury of not being confused.

I had the luxury of just being undecided. I didn't have to know, because I don't have to teach it. But I was interested.

It was fascinating, really, I mean, to see how strong a case each of these views could make. And when I started the Great Commission School in Oregon in 1983, I had become aware of some of these views. I was aware of three of them at that time, and maybe vaguely aware of the fourth.

And I had to teach through the Book of Revelation every year in that school. But only because I had to teach the whole Bible. I mean, I would have gladly left Revelation out.

That's what Calvin did. Calvin wrote commentaries on every book of the Bible except Revelation. Smart man.

I could have run a school, we'd go through the whole Bible up through Jude. You'd have to go elsewhere to learn about Revelation. Well, I didn't think that would draw many students, so I said we'll go through the whole Bible.

And that meant I was obliged to teach the Book of Revelation. I thought, well, how can I teach it? I don't know what it means. So I decided I'll teach all the views.

I'll just put them side by side, tell people what the arguments are, and let them make up their own minds. I don't care what they end up believing. I don't even know what I believe.

I'll just give them all the facts. That way, they won't be mad at me later. Now, what I meant by that is I was kind of mad at my teachers who had only told me the futurist view.

I kind of thought that wasn't very fair. They had never said, now we're going to go through the Book of Revelation, and we take here the futurist view, which we consider to be the best of the various views. I never heard anything even like that.

We just said, the Book of Revelation means this. Never any suggestion that anyone had ever thought otherwise, or that any intelligent person could ever consider another view. When I found out that was not the case, it made me angry.

I'm not a very angry person, so it's not like I blew up, but it made me resentful. I thought, my teachers cheated me. It took me many years to find out what they could have told me.

That is, that there's different views, and I could have, maybe by now, I'd know which one was right, if they'd told me about it. Instead, I have to kind of figure it out myself. I thought, one thing I don't want is to have a bunch of students go through the Bible with me, and come out later, someday, years later, and say, why didn't Steve tell me about this view? How come Steve only told me this view, the one he holds? I thought, well, an educator doesn't indoctrinate, an educator educates.

I will educate my students. I'll tell them all four views. So I went out looking for the book that would compare these views, because I thought it would be easier.

I didn't want to have lots of commentaries to consult, because I'd have to read lots of commentaries to find out all the views in detail, enough to teach them. So I started searching for the book that would compare the four views, side by side. Certainly, there was one.

I eventually found over 100 commentaries on Revelation in print at a Bible college library, which I actually used to do the research for my book. They had over 100 commentaries on Revelation. Apparently, Revelation had gotten a lot of attention from scholars, but no one had ever compared the views side by side, so that a reader could just say, right across the page, this

view, this view, this view, this view of this passage.

And I thought, this is seemingly a tremendous oversight. And I thought it cannot be true. I thought, out there somewhere, someone has done this.

It's been 2,000 years, for crying out loud. Somebody will have done this. There are parallels of the Gospels.

Lots of people have done parallels of the Gospels. Certainly, someone's done parallels of the views of Revelation. It was never done.

And that is why I contacted a number of publishers and asked if they would like to have a book like that written. And I found one that did, and so I wrote it. But I didn't want to write it.

I mean, Revelation is the book I didn't want to teach anything about. It's the book I wanted to ignore, and it ends up being the only book I've ever written a commentary on. But anyway, at least now no one can say, I left them in the dark.

And if you don't have time to read my commentary or don't want to buy it, I'll give you my views for free. But you have to come out to these meetings. Right now, I want to tell you what the four views are, what the strengths and weaknesses of each of them are, and, of course, be as objective as I can.

I've already told you something about my leanings, but not everything. I'll tell you right now, my leanings are partial preterist, partial idealist. And as we go through the book of Revelation, I will justify my position in each case.

But that is the case. Part of the book of Revelation I take preterist. Part of it I take idealist.

I suppose a very, very small part I could say I take futurist, because I do believe the second coming of Christ, the future one, is in there. But not much. It's not mostly about that.

So I'm kind of mix and match, but not randomly, but generally for very good reasons, I think. So let's talk about these views. Let's talk about the historicist view first.

For the simple reason it's the oldest, as near as we can tell. People have asked me, what did the earliest Christians think about Revelation? The answer is, we can't really know. They didn't tell us.

They might have written on it, but their works have not survived. The earliest commentary on Revelation that has survived is from the third century, and it takes a view that seems to be like the historicist view, in a way. What is the historicist view? The historicist view is the idea that the book of Revelation is God writing the whole history of the church in advance, revealing to John the whole age of the church, a panorama of the entire period from John's day to the second coming of Christ, and that as you go through the book of Revelation, you are moving forward through church history from John's day and when you get to the end, you're at the end of the

world, the second coming of Christ.

So it's not believing that the book is about the future or the past, but both and everything in between. And they believe this, that the seven seals, which appear early in the book, as they are broken, they correspond to the breakdown of the Roman Empire. Some historicists, like Adam Clark, sees that as possibly a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, but most historicists think it's the Roman Empire.

So the seven seals being broken are the breakdown of the Roman Empire, especially as it fell to the barbarian hordes, the Goths and the Ostrogoths, and the Vandals and the Huns and so forth. The downfall of Rome, Western Empire, is in the seven seals. Then you have the seven trumpets.

Those, they believe, tell us of the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire, especially to the Islamists, the Mohammedan invasions. Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Empire, fell to the Islamists to the followers of Mohammed. On this view, the fifth trumpet, which brings the locusts, the locusts are the Muslim hordes coming against Constantinople.

And so we lose Rome and the Western Empire in the seven seals. We lose Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire in the seven trumpets. In the midst of that, there's concern about the rise of the papacy.

The papacy rose in the late sixth, early seventh century. And the historicist believes that the papacy is seen in the beast. The beast in Revelation 13 is the papacy and persecutes the saints, which we all dissenters from the Roman Catholic Church.

Now, here's one of the things the historicist view says, and that is that the book of Revelation follows a prophetic rule called the year for a day rule. Year for a day or day for a year means that when you read of a day, it really means a year. They say this is established in the Old Testament.

Where? Well, they always give two examples, not good ones, but they are two examples. It's all they can give. One is when Moses sent the children of Israel to spy out the land of Canaan.

They did so for 40 days. When the people rebelled, God said, I'm going to give you a year in the wilderness for every day that they spied out the land. They were there 40 days.

You're going to wander for 40 years. So we see the year for a day. Now, any thinking person should be able to see that while it is true that they received a year wandering for each day they spied, that in no sense establishes some rule of prophetic interpretation.

It's not even relevant. The other example they give is more relevant. And that is that Ezekiel was told to lie on one side for 390 days and on his other side for 40 days.

And he was told that each of those days represented a year. 390 days represented 390 years of

the judgment upon Judah. And 40 days represented 40 years of judgment upon Israel, if I recall correctly.

And so for each day that he lay on his side, it represented a year of God's judgment. That is, in fact, of course, a true correspondence in a prophetic action. However, not anywhere near enough to establish the principle that this is how we're supposed to interpret prophecy.

No one does that with any of the other numbers in prophecy. Yet, these two things have encouraged the historicists to say a day equals a year. Now, where this comes in handy for them, the locusts afflict men for five months.

A month is 30 days. In the Jewish calendar, that's 150 days. And they point out a beginning and an end of the Muslim attacks and invasions and collapse of Constantinople when they figured out to be exactly 150 years.

Well, the locusts afflict for 150 days or five months. And they apply this also to the papacy. The beast's blasphemies continue for 1,260 days.

Now, if that's literal, it's three and a half years. But the historicists say that is 1,260 years, not days. And so, with the rise of the papacy about 600 AD with Pope Gregory the Great, they measured forward 1,260 years and said, the papacy is going to fall somewhere about the year 1860.

That's because the papacy is only going to last 1,260 years. Now, you can see why with that kind of reckoning, the historicists' view could survive into the 19th century. But it has pretty much fizzled out since then.

The Seventh-day Adventists grew out of a movement led by William Miller, the Millerites, who were historicists, as the Seventh-day Adventists still are. But the Millerites used these calculations to actually calculate the very day that Jesus would come back and judge the papacy. So they, the Millerites actually sold their property, put on white robes, went out on the hillside and waited for Jesus to come back.

The fact that he didn't is actually in church history has been called the Great Disappointment. And, actually, that's the technical term that historians use for the Millerites' disillusionment when Jesus didn't come back. It was called the Great Disappointment.

Somehow, the Seventh-day Adventist church survived it. The Millerites didn't. But the Seventh-day Adventists are just about the only group around today who are still historicists.

And the Seventh-day Adventists advertise in laundromats these colorful posters saying, Revelation Seminar has these pictures of dragons and things on it. And, you know, come to our seminar and learn about the book of Revelation. If you go to one of the Seventh-day Adventist Revelation seminars, you'll learn the historicist approach.

To learn it anywhere else, you have to go to the older Protestant commentaries before the 1800s. Because the historicist view just doesn't really exist anymore, except among the Seventh-day Adventists. And their interpretation isn't anywhere near as sensible as, say, some of the other commentaries were that held it.

So, the historicist view, by the way, has many points of strength about it. Not the least of which is that many things that happened in history related to the fall of the Roman Empire correspond numerically and in detail to some of the visions in Revelation. For example, Albert Barnes in Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, a very thorough commentator, a Presbyterian pastor, who spent some hours every morning of his day writing a few pages, I suppose, of notes, has left a set of books that are just incredibly thorough commentary.

When I was writing my book, I read his commentary on Revelation. And in his introduction, he says, you know, when I undertook to write this commentary on Revelation, I decided I would not take any particular view. He says, I knew there were different views out there, and I just determined that I would not take a view.

I'll just talk about what's said, what it means, not in terms of fulfillment, but what the words mean, and so forth. He was trying to avoid interpreting. But he says, as I read Gibbon's Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire... Now, Edward Gibbon was the great historian of the Roman Empire, and was no Christian.

In fact, he was very anti-Christian, a very antagonistic anti-Christian historian, but he wrote the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire. Professor Barnes, or Pastor Barnes, said, he says, as I read Gibbon's Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire, I could not help but be struck by the almost verbal parallels to the book of Revelation. And he says, I could not keep my commitment to not interpret.

I had to take this view, and he took the historicist's view. Throughout his commentary, he points out, he quotes Gibbon, he quotes other historians and details as he's talking about things in Revelation, and they are impressive. There are impressive parallels.

There are reasons why the best minds in the Protestant Church believed this was the right view. But there were also assumptions they made, for example, the day for year 30, which doesn't really have an awful lot behind it, and of course, their predictions didn't come true in the 19th century. So the view has pretty much fallen aside.

By the way, they thought that the the seven bowl judgments, which Revelation refers to as the seven last plagues, they considered that's the French Revolution. And they pointed out good reasons for thinking so. The problem is, if so, then Revelation ended at the French Revolution, around the same time America was founded.

So the last 250 years have been inconsequential, I guess, not worth mentioning. The last judgments were upon France, or actually on the papacy in France. So there are things about the

historicist's view that just didn't wash out right.

And so you'll hardly find any historicists now, though it was once called the Protestant view. In fact, it was even held before the Protestant Reformation by Huss and Wycliffe, and even some Catholic orders, like the Franciscan Order. The Franciscan Order actually believed that the Pope was the Antichrist.

And this was before there was a Reformation. They were Catholics. But the view was convincing to more than just Protestants, but it was officially the Protestant view.

But it's gone now, mostly. I mean, it's interesting reading. Very interesting.

But I don't find myself capable of taking it seriously, as I probably would have if I was living in 1812 instead of 2012. But anyway, that's the historicist's view. And it really does have a lot of people who were impressive, who held it.

Essentially everybody who wasn't a Catholic. And many Catholics. By the way, the Catholics had to respond.

And what they responded with was Preterism and Futurism. Now, let's talk about the Preterist view. The word Preterist from the Latin word preter means past.

Preterist past. If we say the Futurist view, it means revelations about the future. The Preterist view says revelations about the past.

What past? Well, it wouldn't really matter. If you believe revelation was some time in the past fulfilled, then you're a Preterist of some sort. Because Preterist isn't specific.

It just means fulfillment in the past. Just like not all Futurists agree exactly about the details of the future fulfillment, Preterists don't all exactly agree about the details of the past fulfillment. And as I mentioned, J. Adams, the first Preterist I ever encountered, believed that the first part of Revelation was fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem and the second part in the fall of Rome.

Both of those events are now past, and therefore that's truly a Preterist view. On the other hand, J. Stuart Russell, the next Preterist I read, believed that the whole thing was fulfilled in 70 A.D. And so you'll find different views among Preterists. The view that is most in vogue among Preterists today, the one that if you buy books by Preterists or read them on the internet, pretty much the focus is on 70 A.D. For good reason.

Because many of the things in Revelation seem to correspond with Matthew 24, which Jesus himself identified with 70 A.D. Jesus said the temple would be destroyed. We know when that happened. 70 A.D. Jesus said the temple would be destroyed.

The disciples said, when will these things be? And he gave the Olivet Discourse. And concluded by saying this generation will not pass before all these things are fulfilled. He got that right on the money.

40 years later, down it came. Not one stone left standing on another. One of the most accurate predictions of Jesus, I mean not that any of his were inaccurate, but it was more specific than any other.

It's unusual for a prophet to tell when his prophecies will be fulfilled. Not unheard of, but unusual. Jesus said, this will happen within this generation.

And it came right down to the end of it, and it happened right within that generation. Ironically, atheists have sometimes used Jesus' statement, this generation will not pass before all these things be fulfilled to say, you see, Jesus was wrong. He didn't come back.

But their atheists are futurists. They think Jesus was talking about the future, the end of the world. And it didn't happen in that generation.

But if he was talking about the fall of Jerusalem, which he obviously was, since he talked about the destruction of the temple, then he was exactly right. Preterists are the ones who have the most to be amazed favorably about Jesus, for because we have an amazingly accurate prediction he made about things that would happen after his death, but within the generation of those that heard him. Now, Revelation seems to correspond with Matthew 24 very closely.

As a matter of fact, the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 is found in parallels in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but not in John. John's Gospel omits the Olivet Discourse. One theory is that John didn't see any need to include it.

He'd already written the book of Revelation, and it covered the same ground. And that theory may be correct, because I think Revelation was written before John's Gospel, but we'll worry about that another time. The thing I point out here is that the fall of Jerusalem was a very significant turning point in history, in God's redemptive history.

God made a new covenant and had to dispense with the old. Those Jews who insisted on holding on to the old covenant and refusing to enter into the new, that covenant had to be swept away. So the writer of Hebrews tells us, who apparently was writing shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, the writer of Hebrews in chapter 8 verse 13 says, now the mention of a new covenant makes the first one obsolete.

And then he says that which has become obsolete is about ready to vanish away. That is, he was predicting that the old covenant and all its trappings would soon be swept away. Because it's obsolete now.

And that is not a minor change. After all, the temple and the Jewish order was 1400 years the way that God ordained for people to worship Him and draw near to Him. And that ended.

And something new replaced it. That is no small transition. It's worth mentioning.

In fact, it's so much worth mentioning that Jesus said in Luke 21 when He's actually describing

the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, He says, these are the days of vengeance, so that all things that are written may be fulfilled. That is, Jesus suggested that the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans would be the fulfillment of all things that were written. Now, He's not talking about Revelation because it wasn't written yet.

He's talking about Old Testament prophecy. But if all things that were written in the Old Testament were fulfilled in that event, that makes it a rather important event. Maybe important enough to have a whole New Testament book written about it.

And therefore, preterists believe, most of them today, believe that Revelation is describing the fall of Jerusalem shortly after the time it was written. This is why, as I said earlier, the date of writing is so important to preterists. If the current majority view is correct, if Revelation was written in 96 A.D., it certainly wasn't predicting the fall of Jerusalem because that had already happened a quarter of a century earlier than that.

If it was written in the reign of Nero, however, it was written before 70 A.D. Now, the strongest point about this particular viewpoint is the many references within the book that affirm that its prophecies were on the verge of being fulfilled at the time of writing. The book is written to real people living at the time John wrote. They were real churches.

This was an epistle written to some churches. Churches that John had a relationship with. Jesus sent a message to them through John, and that message was about things that were going to happen.

But not just things that were going to happen. Things that were shortly going to happen. And this is affirmed repeatedly.

In Revelation 1.1, it says, the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants things which must shortly take place. And in verse 3 of chapter 1, at the very end, it says, the time is near. In chapter 1, verse 19, which is not very well translated in most English versions I've seen, but you can look this up in the Greek interlinear versions if you want to.

Verse 19 of chapter 1 should read, write the things which you have seen and the things which are, and the things which are about to take place after this. It says in most translations that shall take place. But the Greek actually says, are about to take place.

The future events recorded in Revelation are said and it's first century readers who are being affirmed this, assured of this, these things are about to happen. The time is near. The time is short.

More impressive than any of that seems to be the fact that when John gives the mark of the beast at 666 in Revelation 13, 18, he thinks his readers can figure out who it is, if they're smart. He says in Revelation 13, 18, here is wisdom, let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. His number is 666.

Well, if his readers could calculate this number and figure out who the beast is, the beast must be contemporary. The beast must be someone living at the time and therefore the fulfillment of those chapters about the beast must have been soon. Within the lifetime of the man that they would identify by that designation, 666.

It would suggest a soon fulfillment. What impresses me most along these lines is Revelation 22 and verse 10. At one level it just looks like a repetition of one of the earlier statements, but it has a different feature than the others.

In Revelation 22, 10 an angel said to John, do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. Now the time is at hand is not the first time that phrase has come up. In fact, it was at the end of chapter 1, verse 3. But the part that's new here is this line, do not seal up this book because the time is at hand.

And this is a clear contrast to Daniel chapter 12. At the close of Revelation John is told not to seal the book. At the close of Daniel, Daniel is told to seal his book.

You know why? Because the time was not at hand. In other words, Daniel is told in chapter 12, he said, what shall the end of these things be? Daniel asked the question. And he was told by this angel, just seal it up.

Go your way. Never mind. You're going to live to be old and you're going to die and be buried.

You'll rise up in the end. But in the later days, sometime much later than your lifetime, knowledge will increase. This will be opened up.

People will understand it then, but not in your time. It's not going to be fulfilled right yet. According to 1 Peter chapter 1 in verses 10 through 12, the fulfillment was in the first century.

Daniel's prophecy was looking forward to the establishment of the church and apparently the destruction of Jerusalem. So Daniel was predicting things that were about oh, 500 years or so, maybe 600 years after his own time. That was far enough off to seal the book up.

It's not going to be immediately relevant. There's a gap of 600 years. Yet some people want us to believe there's a gap of 2,000 years between the writing of Revelation and the fulfillment of its visions.

That is, the future's view holds that they're not even fulfilled yet. So they were in no sense about to take place when John wrote it. The time was not near.

The time was not at hand. It was at least 2,000 years off, if not more. And yet he was told, don't seal the book.

The time is at hand. But Daniel was to seal his book because it wasn't at hand. The prophecies of Daniel were 600 years off.

That's way off in the future. But 2,000 years is right around the corner? Not likely. Now, of course, the futurist deals with these verses.

They say, well, when it says the time is at hand, it means from God's point of view. We have to remember that a day to the Lord is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. So if it's been 2,000 years, that's just a couple days for God.

The time really was at hand. But, of course, we ought to do some thinking before we put forward arguments. Especially if we hope to convince people with them.

Revelation was not written to God. It was written to people. And when they are assured these things are about to happen, they would in no sense think that means a couple thousand years from now.

Because a couple thousand years is not just around the corner to any human being. To God, maybe. But, hey, a million years may be just around the corner to God.

In other words, if in fact he's saying from God's point of view, it's not very far off, well, then he's telling us nothing at all. It might be a thousand years, a million years, a billion years. From God's point of view, he's an attorney.

What does he care? From his point of view, anything's near. In other words, you'd have to, in order to communicate that information, you'd better say nothing at all. Because by saying it's near, you give the impression that it's near from our point of view, from the reader's point of view.

It's very deceptive if it means, oh, from God's point of view. Why would anyone measure things from God's point of view? When the Bible talks about Satan will be loosed for a short time, does that mean several thousand years? I don't think so, because the long time that he's bound is only a thousand. A short time must be short compared to a thousand.

It's not realistic to suggest that God would tell these readers that these things are about to take place. The book should not be sealed, because the time is at hand, and him really mean that it's going to happen about 50 or more generations after their time. In other words, it's not the least bit relevant to them, but he's talking like it's deadly relevant.

Like it's right around the corner. If, in fact, this was written before 70 A.D., and if, in fact, it is describing the fall of Jerusalem, a suggestion that has much in its favor when we go through the book, then it was about to take place, and we don't have to come up with innovative ways to explain away those plain and common frequent statements. These are some of the advantages of the Preterist view.

It makes sense of the passages we were just looking at about near fulfillment. It makes the book relevant to the original readers. What a concept.

If the Futurist view is correct, the book is not relevant to the readers. It may not even be relevant to us. We don't know if we're living in the time of fulfillment, but if most Futurists are correct, and those are dispensationalists, we're going to get raptured out of here about chapter 4, verse 1. That means that about 80% of the book is not relevant to any Christians ever, because whatever Christians are around in the last days are going to go away in chapter 4. Everything after that is irrelevant.

What a strange thing for God to do, to spend so much time giving us a message in code to confuse us for 2,000 years when we break the code and find out, oh, it doesn't have to do with any Christian ever. This is about some people who aren't saved, who go into the tribulation. I don't know.

I mean, God could do that. It just doesn't make an awful lot of sense. It seems more likely that an epistle will be relevant to its readers.

All the other epistles are in the Bible. Preter's view would make it so. It would agree with the Olivet Discourse.

Again, there are parallels, many, between the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation. And the Olivet Discourse is stated to be fulfilled in the first generation in the destruction of Jerusalem. So, that would be a corollary.

It agrees impressively with the history of the Jewish war recorded by Josephus. I told you that earlier. I had not known much about the Jewish war until I had much of Josephus writings thrust before me.

And I had to admit, it does certainly impressively parallel. Now, of course, remember the historicist's view finds impressive parallels between Revelation and the fall of Roman Gibbon. So, I mean, anyone can find impressive parallels.

I'll tell you what, there are whole ministries on the radio. They've been on radio for decades, that every single radio program, they find impressive parallels between Revelation and whatever's in the newspapers. I remember listening to that ministry when I was young, and they said, it seemed like almost every time they were on the radio, these guys said, you know, things are lined up in the world, in the geopolitical situation.

I can't use, I can't quite imitate the southern accent, but laughter It's all lined up exactly as the Bible said it would be in the last days. Well, to everybody's surprise, in the 1980s, the Soviet Union fell. The iron current went down.

Everything changed. I wanted to tune them in the next day and see what they say about that, because everything before that was lined up exactly as the Bible said it would in the last days. You know what? I tuned them in the next day, they said, the fall of the Soviet Union has brought things into precise alignment with the way the Bible says it will be in the last days.

So I thought, well, I guess, no matter what happens, it's exactly what the Bible said would happen. So we've got the Futurists, the Historists, and the Preterists, all able to find impressive parallels with the book of Revelation at whatever time they're thinking it relates to. But suffice it to say, if you thought, well, I would believe the Preterist view on other grounds, but I don't know that any of these things ever happened.

The historian Josephus said they did, and he didn't know the book of Revelation had even been written. Of course, if this view is correct, it renders the emperor passages intelligible. The present emperor, 666, I gave you this information a moment ago.

Now, there are disadvantages of the position. One is it requires a date of writing earlier than 70 AD. That's the biggest disadvantage.

It's the only real disadvantage of the Preterist view, but it's not a small one. It requires a date of writing before the fall of Jerusalem in order for this approach to be correct. Yet, while it is controversial, it is not the majority view.

The majority view of scholars is that it was written later than that. But that wasn't the majority view a century and a half ago, and so majority views may not matter that much. Truth is never determined by a vote, the majority vote.

The truth is that while the majority of modern scholars think the Revelation was written after 70 AD, that is not incontrovertible. In fact, there are some very good arguments for the early date. That would be the main concern.

It is claimed by critics of this view that it has a checkered past because it is well known that when the Protestants were presenting the Historicist view throughout Europe and calling the Pope the Antichrist, that there was a Jesuit named Luis de Alcazar who published a pro-Roman Catholic book saying that the book of Revelation was about the fall of Jerusalem and the fall of Rome. He took the view very similar to what J. Adams did, that the first part of the book of Revelation was about the fall of Jerusalem. The second part was the fall of Rome.

Luis de Alcazar, a Roman Catholic, writing more or less no doubt to defend the Pope's reputation that he wasn't the Antichrist, said, no, the book of Revelation isn't as the Protestants say, it is in fact about things long fulfilled ago. Now, it is true that Luis de Alcazar did put forward the Preterist view to defend the Pope's against the charges of the Historicists. But, he didn't originate it.

We have evidence that a thousand years before Alcazar, this view existed among Church Fathers. There is an ancient Church writer named Andreas who wrote another one named Arethas. Andreas and Arethas were two ancient writers back in the 7th century.

A thousand years before Luis de Alcazar, who wrote commentaries on Revelation. We don't have their complete commentaries. We have quotations of them in other works.

But, Arethas, for example, was writing about Revelation 7.1, about the sealing of the 144,000. Arethas said, here then were manifestly shown to the evangelist what things were to befall the Jews in their war against the Romans. In the way of avenging the sufferings inflicted upon Christ.

And, the same author in Revelation 7.4 wrote, when the evangelist received these oracles, the destruction in which the Jews were involved was not yet inflicted by the Romans. Now, this is only one writer. We have no reason to believe this was necessarily the majority view of his time, but it could have been.

We don't know. But, he said, first of all, Jerusalem had not fallen when Revelation was written. In other words, he said it was a pre-70 AD date of writing, differing from what most people interpreted Irenaeus to say.

But, also he said that Revelation 7.1 was about the calamity that was coming on the Jews from the Romans. So, we do see a preterist view championed by at least one author a thousand years before Alcazar. Alcazar might have had motives we don't trust for promoting the view, but he didn't originate it.

Now, as far as the Olivet Discourse is concerned, which is like the book of Revelation, Eusebius, the church historian, certainly applied it to 70 AD. I have a quote here from his Ecclesiastical History written in 325 AD talking about Matthew 24. Actually, what he's talking about is the fall of Jerusalem.

The historian is describing Rome destroying Jerusalem in 70 AD, and he wrote this. He said, it is fitting to add to these accounts the true prediction of our Savior in which he foretold these very events. His words are as follows.

Woe unto them that are with child and them that give suck in those days, but pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day, for there shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no ever shall be. He's quoting, of course, Matthew 24, verses 19 through 21. Now, the historian, the Christian historian, in 325 AD is recording the fall of Jerusalem, and he says this fulfilled the true prediction of Jesus.

He called that the great tribulation. He quotes the Olivet Discourse. He doesn't quote Revelation, but there's a reason for that.

Eusebius actually wrote before Revelation was accepted into the canon of Scripture, and he did not accept its canonicity. Eusebius himself was one of those that were not favorable to the inclusion of Revelation in the canon, so of course he wouldn't quote Revelation, but he quotes the Olivet Discourse and clearly takes a preterist view. So, in other words, whatever else may be said for or against the preterist view, there were early writers who were preterists, and therefore it's not a view that was originated by the Roman Catholics to fight off the Protestants.

Now, the futurist view you know something about, and let me go through this quickly since

you're familiar with it. I don't have to explain it to you. The futurist view is the view most people have heard.

Some have heard no other. On this view, everything, at least after chapter 3 in Revelation is future. The first three chapters deal with the seven letters dictated to be sent to the seven churches.

They have to do with events happening in the time of John. I think most scholars, even futurists, agree with that. But they believe that at chapter 4, verse 1, the rapture of the church takes place.

That is, they believe that the first three chapters are pretty much the only part of Revelation relevant to the church or the church age. The church age ends at the end of chapter 3, and the rapture takes place in chapter 4. That, of course, is still future. So, on their view, everything beyond chapter 4 is future.

And they place all the prophecies from chapter 4 through chapter 19 within a seven year period that they call the tribulation. The futurist believes there will be a seven year tribulation. Some futurists have believed that the tribulation is only three and a half years, like Edward Irving, before Darby came along.

But not much before. These men were contemporaries, Darby and he. But Edward Irving thought the tribulation was only three and a half years.

Darby thought it was seven. And most dispensationalists make it seven. But the point is that everything between chapter 4 and chapter 19 is in that short period of time at the end of the world.

The tribulation ends, whether three and a half years long or seven years long, the tribulation ends with the second coming of Christ. So, obviously, the prophecies after chapter 4 will be squished into a very short period just prior to the end of the world when Jesus comes back. Chapter 20, then, is seen to be a millennial kingdom that Jesus establishes at his return.

And chapters 21 and 22, then, are the new heavens, new earth, which are placed after the millennium on this scheme. So, on the future scheme, almost everything is still future. Chapter 4 on through 19 is a future tribulation, not yet begun.

Chapter 20 is a future millennium. Chapters 21 and 22 are future new heavens and new earth. That's how the futurist view reads it.

Now, what are the advantages of this view? Well, it's the most popular view, if that's in its favor. But it has not always been, so I guess it's not in its favor, since different views are popular at different times. I guess the real meaning can't change with the change of popular, you know, popularity of the view.

So, that would be probably the strength of the view in the average futurist view is that my pastor teaches it. Or the guys on the radio teach it, or on television teach it. That Jack Van Impe, he can quote scripture like a machine gun.

He believes it, so it must be true. My pastor knows the Bible front and back, and he believes it's true, so it must be true. The fact that I only hear this view from the people I respect means it must be true.

That is probably the primary strength of the view in the minds of most is that if it isn't true, why does this guy think it is? And I've had people call me about that many, many times. They don't have arguments in favor of the futurist view, except they say if you're right, how come John MacArthur? How come Chuck Smith? How come Jack Van Impe? How come John Hagee? How come everybody who's famous believes this futurist view? Well, they'll have to answer for themselves, but the fact that a lot of people believe it has never been an evidence that something is true. After all, if you had been born 200 years ago in a Protestant world, a Protestant home, you would have never heard of the futurist view, and no one you knew would have believed it.

Everyone you knew would have been a historicist. That doesn't mean that was true. The fact that you live in a time bubble where a particular view is the only view people are considering seriously doesn't mean it's true.

Let's get less provincial and move out and look at things from a bigger picture. You know, things are popular for whatever reasons they're popular. It's not necessarily because they're true.

But that is probably the strongest advantage of the view, is that if you believe it, you'll be in the company of most of the famous Christians today. It also appeals to our tendency to take things literally. Now, of course, the dispensational view actually presents this as a value.

We need to take things literally in the Bible. And so, if you're going to take those visions literally to the happy future, because no one would argue that any of those things in relation have literally happened in the past, it must be future. So, a future approach is very much supported by the assumption that a literal interpretation is called for.

It also harmonizes reasonably well with some current events, as I pointed out. Of course, that's true of some of the other views, too. I mean, you find a view of Revelation, you can find something to correlate with it.

Josephus, if you're a preterist, Gibbon, if you're a prehistoricist, the newspapers, if you're a futurist. And, as I said, this changes from time to time as the newspapers change. Those of us who have moved away from futurism sometimes disdainfully speak of the methods of futurism as newspaper exegesis.

We believe that you should interpret the Scripture by reference to other Scripture, not by

reference to the New York Times. Because, after all, the New York Times are not inspired, and there's no evidence that anything in the New York Times was ever predicted in the Bible. Such harmonizations that the modern futurist duke had been made by Christians throughout the last centuries.

Futurists in Darby's time could harmonize it with his time. You know, between World War I and World War II, there was an organization that predated the United Nations, called the League of Nations. And, it was formed between nations to try to end wars before World War II came and proved that they were ineffectual.

And, during that season between the wars, a Christian author named William S. McBurney, Sr. Now, his son lived into our time and has been a radio preacher from the time I was a kid. I don't know if he's still around or not, William S. McBurney, Jr. But, William S. McBurney, Sr. wrote a book on Bible prophecy. He's a dispensationalist futurist.

And, my dad had a copy when I was growing up and I was reading this. And, it was interesting because he said that the Bible says there's going to be a ten-nation confederacy in the end times in Europe. And, he said, the League of Nations is that ten-nation confederacy.

Of course, the League of Nations doesn't even exist anymore. We now have the United Nations. And, frankly, most people don't say it's the ten... Most people want it to be the common market or what's called the European Union.

But, there's always problems with these things. For instance, McBurney's book had to admit that the League of Nations had thirteen member nations, not ten. And, he pointed that out.

He said, you know, some of you may object to my saying that the League of Nations is the ten-nation confederacy mentioned in Scripture. But, he says, you have to realize there are thirteen nations so that we will not recognize it for what it is. That is the deceptiveness of the devil.

The devil doesn't want us to know that this is the ten-nation confederacy, so he's made thirteen nations be in it. Now, this man was a reputable dispensational teacher, pastor of a large church and had media ministry. But, you see, when we say, wow, things are lining up in the news just like the book of Revelation said.

And, we mean by that just like we think the book of Revelation means we sometimes may be tempted to shoehorn things in that don't fit all that well. And, so, you get the impression from some of these ministries that the book of Revelation is being fulfilled before our eyes. But, when I ask people, well, tell me something right now that's going on in the world that is predicted in the book of Revelation.

To actually find something in our modern world that corresponds with something the book of Revelation teaches is hard. Now, Hal Lindsey found some things back in 1970 in his late great plan of earth. He pointed out that the kings of the east in Revelation have an army of 200 million men.

200,000,000 to be exact. 200 million. And, he said, you know, Mao Tse Tung back in the 1960's boasted that China could field an army of 200 million men.

The very number that's in the book of Revelation. That's a pretty close correspondence. Kings of the east, 200 million men.

China's in the east. But, I mean, that was perhaps one of the more impressive parallels. But, most of the parallels don't work.

And, I don't think the kings of the east in Revelation are China. I think it's a reference to the Persian Empire. But, anyway, we'll worry about that another time.

The disadvantages of the view are that it renders the book 90% irrelevant to all Christians. Including the original readers. It fails to recognize the symbolic character of apocalyptic literature.

They don't realize that apocalyptic literature is a genre that is characterized by symbolism. And, they just charge forward with their literal hermeneutic and insist that we have to take a literal thing. And, that's the only real reason to take it futuristically.

And, the other thing is that it struggles to explain the book's own predictions of a soon fulfillment. Which we saw there are several. If the book claims to have a soon fulfillment and it wasn't fulfilled for 2,000 years, you've got to do some fancy footwork to make that make sense.

They do. But, not fancy enough to impress me. Okay, the final view to consider and I'm going to be done with it is the spiritual slash idealist view.

The idealist view holds that Revelation is not describing any particular time past, present, or future. That the visions of Revelation do not connect with actual events at all. They are symbolic, impressionistic, they are dramatic depictions of ideals or principles that are true, that are Christian theology depicted in pictures.

The book Pilgrim's Progress would be a good example of an idealist kind of a piece of literature. Pilgrim's Progress is a piece of fiction. But, everything in it depicts true biblical doctrines through fiction.

It's a dramatized story made up to get across true Christian ideals and theology. That's what they say the book of Revelation was. It was just a drama, just a symbolic drama, and it's trying to get across some ideas.

Ideas like that there is a warfare between Christ and Satan. That Christians are involved in this warfare and can defeat Satan if they fight him. Well, even if they die as martyrs, they will be vindicated in heaven because the martyrs are seen up there.

Now, also a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God in moving nations about and judging nations as seen there. There are certain concepts the sovereignty of God, the victory of Christ

over Satan, and things like this which are true Christian doctrines, which are said to be depicted sort of figuratively, symbolically in these visions. But, that they are not really corresponding with a one-to-one correspondence to any particular events in history.

It's possible that these ideals can be seen worked out in lots of different historical situations. There may be recurrent fulfillment, so to speak, that the idea of the sovereignty of God can be seen thousands of times in history. Or, spiritual warfare, or martyrdom, things that are in Revelation.

They're in history, but they're not referring to any particular cases. So that you've got these three options. Either Revelation's talking about things future, or things past, or the whole scope of Christian history, or nothing at all in history.

But, it's just a theological masterpiece like Pilgrim's Progress, portrayed in a dramatic fiction. Spiritual truths, and Christian truths. Now, the idealist view can make very impressive arguments, and one of the great advantages of it is it is relevant to people of all times.

Because, the truths are always relevant. It becomes an edifying book, the principles of which can be applied to your life at any given time. No matter what generation or century you live in.

That's a good thing. The disadvantage of the idealist view, I have to admit, is it says there are no actual fulfillments. And, the book of Revelation itself says a number of times, these are things which will shortly take place.

Which sounds like events. What takes place generally are events. And, so there is supposed to be something going to take place that is being predicted here.

Which means the idealist view doesn't quite measure up. But, the idealist view otherwise is so impressive that some people have mixed it with other views. You could be a futurist and an idealist.

You could be a historicist and an idealist. You can be a preterist and an idealist. Or, you can just be an idealist.

But, the problem of being just an idealist is you don't find any particular fulfillment of events taking place that the prophecy said there's going to be events taking place. So, some think the events are the preterist events, or the futurist events, or the historicist events, but that the lessons of idealism still pertain. I mentioned that I myself am partially a preterist and partially an idealist.

But, it's not that I see the whole book as having a preterist and an idealist relevance, but rather parts of the book I see as preterist and other parts as idealist. And, the transitions from one part to the next are actually very logical and called for by the material in the text. And, that's what I'll be assuming and not just assuming, but defending as my view when I go through it verse by verse, which is what we'll start doing in tomorrow night's lectures.

We'll start going through chapter one, and we'll work our way through the whole book. I will give you a very thorough exegesis of every passage, looking up the various passages that are alluded to, cross-referencing with relevant historical things where that's useful, and giving my reasons. I will not be taking an even-handed approach, trying to give you the four views all the way through, much as I would if I had four times as long.

But, since I only have now less than, what, twelve, thirteen sessions to do it all, I'm going to have to move more quickly than I could if I was trying to take four views. So, I'm going to instead give you my views, my understanding of it, and if you want the four views handled even-handedly by the same teacher, you can get my book. And I'm not here to sell books.

You can't buy it from me, because I won't sell them. But, I will tell you what I think. And that's something I didn't do to my readers.

I didn't tell my readers what I think, but you'll know.

OpenTheo

Revelation 1

Revelation - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an insightful analysis of the Book of Revelation, starting with the identification of John as the writer of the book. He explains that the phrase "born witness" means to bear witness to one's faith at the cost of one's life, which John did, and also that the word of God refers to both the written word and Jesus Christ. Gregg also delves into the symbolism of the book, including the seven eyes of Christ representing the seven spirits of God. Finally, he notes that the "first and last" phrase used to describe Jesus in Revelation is a reference to Yahweh in the Old Testament.

Transcript

We're turning now to the first chapter of the Book of Revelation. We've had several sessions of introduction, and so now we're prepared to look at the book itself and begin to go through it. The first chapter, actually the first three chapters, stand out as different from the rest of the book in that they are not specifically prophetic.

The prophetic portion seems to begin in chapter 4 when John is caught up into heaven and begins to see visions that he reports. Here there is a vision, in fact, but it's not predicting anything. Rather, he has a vision of Jesus Christ and Jesus commissions him to write a letter.

The book almost seems to have two beginnings, one of them in verse 4 where it says, John, to the seven churches which are in Asia. It sounds like he's beginning a book. But later on, he says, John, I, John, your brother, in verse 9, and he mentions himself more than once as the author in the first person.

But the first three verses are not in the first person. The first three verses are in the third person. In that respect, it resembles Ezekiel.

Ezekiel is a book that the author writes in the first person. I saw this, I saw that, and this happened to me. That's what John says throughout the book too.

But the only exception is that the, I think, verses 2 and 3 of Ezekiel chapter 1 are in the third person. And they talk about Ezekiel. Likewise, the first three verses of Revelation are in the third

person.

They talk about Ezekiel, about John, and this is not him talking. And this gives us the impression that the book was preserved after John wrote it. And it was issued with some kind of an introductory remark from whoever preserved it.

Probably the elders of the Church of Ephesus, since John is reputed to have spent his final years in Ephesus. There is, it's probable that the elders of the Church of Ephesus preserved the book, and when it was finally circulated, it was circulated with this commendation, as it were, from the leaders of the Church. They don't say who they are, but they are not John himself.

Because it says in the first three verses, The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants, things which must shortly take place. And he sent and signified it by his angel to his servant John, who bore witness of the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it, for the time is near.

Now this mentions John in the third person, and it's a generic introduction to the book. It tells us that the book was given by God to John, but not directly. It was actually given to Jesus Christ, who then sent it by his angel to John.

Now this angel is hard to identify. Does this mean that the vision he sees in chapter one of this figure who speaks to him is the angel through whom Jesus sent the message? It's not entirely clear, however the angel, if that is him, speaks as if he is in fact Jesus. The person that John describes in chapter one that he will see, is almost always identified with Jesus because of the things he says, that only Jesus could say.

On the other hand, in the Old Testament, the expression, the angel of the Lord, whenever he spoke, spoke as if he was the Lord. He was the messenger of the Lord. It was considered to be a theophany by most theologians.

Most theologians believe that the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament was the Lord appearing in a form other than his own form. As for example, in the burning bush. God is not literally a fire, but he appeared as a fire in a bush.

And this is called theophany. And the Bible says when Moses came to the bush, that the Lord spoke to him from the bush. It also says the angel of the Lord spoke to him.

In fact, alternately it's the angel of the Lord or the Lord speaking. Now, the relationship of the angel and the Lord is never explained. And there perhaps are mysteries that we cannot expect to understand in this life because this has to do with heavenly things and we don't have perhaps the frame of reference for it.

But, in any case, the angel that brings the message talks as if he is Jesus. Is this Jesus? Or is it a messenger coming and, as it were, speaking as a mouthpiece for Jesus? Who knows? I don't

know. We will probably never know.

Maybe you have an opinion and maybe it's the right one. I don't even have an opinion. I just think it's interesting and perplexing that he says the message was sent.

It was given by God to Jesus. Jesus sent the message by his angel to John. And John is sending it to the churches.

So the churches are getting it from God about five stages removed. But it's nonetheless said to be a prophecy and therefore a word from the Lord. As it says in verse 3, Blessed is he who reads those who hear the words of this prophecy.

Now, it says in verse 1, in the middle, that these are things which must shortly take place. And at the end of verse 3 it says, for the time is near. So that the readers are informed that this is not going to be describing things that are some very great distance off.

The time is near. Shortly take place. These are emphatic and repeated expressions.

If they do not mean what they seem to mean, then they are extremely deceptive. Some people say, well, now we live 2,000 years later. This hasn't been fulfilled yet.

Therefore, it wasn't very shortly. So it must have been shortly from God's point of view. Well, how do we know it hasn't been fulfilled yet? Who told us that? Maybe it has.

Maybe, in fact, it did happen shortly. Maybe it did happen and the time was near. That's something we'll have to investigate.

It is possible that the words are true. After all, if God spoke them, he might have been right. And if he did not mean that they were going to be shortly in human terms, that is like maybe in the next few years at the very most, if that was not true, then he would have been much more kind to have mentioned nothing about how soon or how late it would be.

Just say nothing. Just say these will someday happen. To repeatedly say shortly, at hand, about to take place.

Every time he says that is going to be misleading if it's not, in fact, talking about things that are about, in fact, to take place and that the readers should be apprised of because it will perhaps have some effect on the world in which they live. And it says in verse 2 that the angel gave it to John and John bore witness of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Now, these two expressions, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, are found repeatedly, sometimes in parallel and sometimes one or another by itself.

The word testimony is a very important word in the book of Revelation. It's the same word for witness. And so the word witness, the word testimony, is frequently occurring in Revelation.

The word witness is the word martia and which is, actually we get our word martyr from that.

Jesus is called the faithful witness in the Greek, the faithful martyr. Now, just so we don't get too confused, when we think of the word martia as meaning martyr, it's a bit of an anachronism.

We're reading back into it a later meaning. In the time of the book of Revelation, the word martia simply meant a witness, somebody who testifies to something. Over time, especially as Christians began to die for their faith because they bore witness to their own undoing and were put to death, the term came to mean somebody who bore witness at the cost of his life.

And therefore, it came to mean somebody who died for their convictions. And that's how we think of the word martyr. When we say someone's a martyr, we mean they're either dying or maybe less literally suffering some reason because they're taking a stand that's unpopular.

That's what we think of as martyrs. There were many martyrs in the early church in that sense. But that is not what the word meant at the time.

The word martia simply meant a witness, though many witnesses, including some of the ones in the book of Revelation, sealed their testimony with their blood. The two witnesses, for example, in chapter 11, they bear witness in the time of their testimony is spoken of, testifying as witnesses do in a court of law. A witness is somebody who's seen something and knows something and is testifying to it.

And that's different than just somebody who believes something. And I often find myself having to make this distinction for people who don't understand that. I mentioned that the apostles died for their testimony and therefore they obviously believed it.

And atheists sometimes say, well, so what? Lots of people die for their beliefs. There's Muslims who die for their beliefs. There's Mormons who die for their beliefs.

Lots of people die for their beliefs. That doesn't mean they're true. I have to say, well, you didn't hear me.

I didn't say they died for their beliefs. They died for their testimony. People can believe anything for good or bad reasons, but you only testify to what you've seen.

A Muslim who dies no doubt thinks that his beliefs are true, but he doesn't know they are. He just believes it. He happens to be deceived.

A person who has seen something knows that what he's seen is true. He's seen it with his own eyes. That's why eyewitness testimony is the strongest of all evidences that can be presented in a court of law.

It's even better than expert testimony. You don't have to be an expert. You just have to have seen something to be a witness.

If you say you saw something and you die for that testimony, then there's a good chance that you're not mistaken. You did see what you said, and you're telling the truth. That a Christian

today would die for their beliefs doesn't mean they're dying for their testimony.

It's not the same thing. They might have just been convinced by somebody that Jesus is real, and they died. It's the same thing with any religion.

But John testified to what he saw, and that's an important word in the book of Revelation because many of the people in Revelation are testifying. Antipas is a faithful witness who died in the church of Pergamon. And Jesus is a faithful witness.

We know he died. The two witnesses died in Revelation. So the witnesses actually do become martyrs in the later sense of that word in many cases.

John, in this case, had borne witness. He didn't die as a martyr. He was a martia, a witness, but he didn't happen to die.

John would be what the later church would call a confessor. In times of persecution, like those when the Roman emperors were killing Christians, if a Christian was arrested and put on trial, he would end up being one of three things. If he stuck to his guns and did not back down from his testimony, and he died for it, he'd be called a martyr.

If he did back down from his testimony and denied his faith, he was called a lapse. He lapsed. And if he did not back down from his testimony and was prepared to die, but for some reason escaped death, he was called a confessor.

These were three categories of the early church during times of persecution. A man who backed down on his testimony under threats of death was called a lapse. And there were many lapses.

The early church in the 2nd and 3rd century had problems deciding what to do with lapses once they came back. The persecution ended and they came back and said, I want to be a Christian again. And there were many in the church who did not want to accept them back because many in the church had had their own brothers and sisters and fathers killed because they wouldn't lapse.

And so the ones who did lapse struck them as traitors and cowards and so forth. But there were many lapses. A man who backed down under threats and backed off his testimony was a lapse.

The one who was prepared to die and did not back down, but for some reason escaped dying, he was a confessor. And the one who actually did die was a martyr. Those terms were used in the early church quite a bit.

John actually was a confessor. He's the only one of the apostles we know of who did not die as a martyr. Yet he was a confessor because according to the stories from the early church, he was subjected to that which should have killed him.

He was condemned to be dipped in boiling oil. And apparently he was. But he survived.

Apparently unscathed. We don't have absolute knowledge of this, but this is in the traditions of the early church. We do know of other cases that are not dissimilar, like Polycarp who was burned at the stake but the flames wouldn't touch him.

And that was witnessed by a whole arena. So, I mean, there were miracles like that. And John, this tradition about John may be true, that he was dipped in boiling oil, but he survived.

And out of frustration, the persecutors sent him to the island of Patmos, which was a prison island where it's a rocky island just a few miles off the coast of Turkey, sort of a crescent-shaped island where prisoners went to break rocks, sort of like a chain gang colony. And so John found himself, as we shall see, on Patmos because of his testimony. We will see.

That's what he says in verse 9. I, John, both your brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Notice the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. We found it in verse 2 also.

John bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ. Now, both of these expressions have the word of in them. And scholars cannot decide on something.

And that is, does the testimony of Jesus Christ mean a testimony that is born about Jesus Christ? Like, if I testify about Christ, that's the testimony of Christ I'm presenting. Or does it mean the testimony that Christ testifies? Like a witness on the stand gives his testimony, Christ is giving his testimony. It's the testimony of Jesus.

That is something that the phrase can go either way, as scholars tell us. The Greek scholars say it's not clear whether it is Jesus' own testimony that is here spoken of, which is being given through John, Jesus is speaking through John, or whether it's just John speaking about Jesus. Likewise, the word of God, is that the word about God, or is that the word from God? The phrase can mean either one.

And this becomes a puzzle for many scholars who are trying to sort out the Greek of the book of Revelation, which is itself problematic. But we can see one thing without having to decide those issues, and that is that John equated the word of God with the testimony of Jesus Christ. And both of those, no doubt, were equated with the gospel, preaching the gospel.

Later on, we're going to read in chapter 11 that many of the martyrs overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. The word of their testimony probably, in all probability, means their preaching of the gospel. The testimony of Jesus was the testimony about, or from, Jesus about the gospel.

And the word of God is another term used apparently in the same way. And we find them linked in the book of Revelation again and again, and often the word testimony or witness, the same word, is found in it by itself. Key themes in the book.

And it says that John borrowed testimony, verse 2, of Jesus Christ and to all the things that he saw. And he says, Now, to hear it is one thing, or read it. Probably the one who reads is considered to be the one who would be the public reader in the church.

People didn't have their own copies of this to take home and read. They didn't have printing presses, so it was very, very difficult to get a copy of any kind of written literature. It had to be handwritten, every copy.

But what would normally happen is a reader in the church would get up and read it out loud to the church. So, blessed is he who reads may be a blessing on the public reader who reads it, and then on anyone who keeps the words. Now, this doesn't mean preserves them.

It means obeys them, of course. To keep the word of God means to obey it. So, the book is not just about predictions.

It's got imperatives. It's not just saying there are things going to happen. It's saying there are things that must be done.

Actions, commandments that must be kept and obeyed. And so he says, So, because the time is near, the person who keeps these words is blessed. Meaning, apparently some people will be in trouble if they don't keep them because the time is near.

There is a time that was near, a time of judgment and calamity that the book of Revelation is going to tell about. But there will be those who apparently can escape it. Those who can be blessed through it.

But only if they keep the warnings and the instructions in the book. And there are such warnings, especially in the seven letters of the seven churches that we will find. Now, at that point, the prologue, we might call it, but it's attached by somebody else, ends.

And John begins his book. John to the seven churches which are in Asia. A typical way of opening any epistle.

The author identifies himself, identifies his audience. There were, as I've said, more than seven churches in Asia at this time. There were at least ten.

There might have been many more. But in addition to the seven that are named in Revelation, there was a church at Troas and one at Hierapolis and one in Colossae. And they are not included.

So the number is seemingly artificially kept at seven. When it could have been eight, nine, or ten or maybe more if there were more churches that we don't know about. It is clear that the number seven is deliberately maintained in many senses in the book of Revelation because of its symbolic value.

Seven means completion. To say this is to the seven churches, no doubt seven of them were

selected because their number suggests wholeness or completeness. The whole church of all time perhaps.

And so we would find then that the messages of the seven churches are applicable to them but to all churches besides too. And that is what I would think to be the significance of there being seven churches addressed. Although there were other churches in the region that were not here addressed.

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come. And from the seven spirits who are before his throne. And from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loved us and washed us from our sins with his own blood. Some translations say who freed us from our sins in his own blood. And has made us kings and priests.

Older translations say, or the older manuscripts say a kingdom of priests. There are many textual variants in Revelation. Let me just say this.

Revelation, the text of Revelation in the original is more difficult than most. You know many people say they think the Textus Receptus from which the King James was translated is the most pure text of the New Testament. Many people don't know that the Textus Receptus was put together by Erasmus from Greek manuscripts available in his time.

Many more have been found since then that he didn't have. But he translated the, well he didn't translate, what he did was he collected the best text of every book of the Bible and made what's called an eclectic text in Hebrew and Greek. But when it came to Revelation there were no Greek texts.

In his day no Greek text of Revelation had ever been found. The church had been using for centuries the Latin Bible which Jerome had translated from the Greek. And the Greek texts had been lost of Revelation.

There were no Greek texts in existence that he knew of or anyone else at that time. So what Erasmus did, he took the Latin Vulgate and made his own Greek translation from the Latin. And that became the Textus Receptus of Revelation.

Now what that means is of course there's a lot of guesswork in it. He didn't know what the actual original Greek words were. He had to kind of deduce it from Jerome's translation which he had made centuries earlier from the Greek into the Latin.

Now he has to translate it, make his own original translation back from the Latin into the Greek. Now the King James and the New King James which we are using actually use the Textus Receptus. But since that time there have been Greek texts of Revelation discovered.

And so we have texts of Revelation that Erasmus didn't have and were not available when the

King James was written. So the bottom line is this. There are parts of the Greek text of Revelation that probably need to be corrected by the older manuscripts.

And so when we come to those parts I'll do my best to let you know where they are. And in this case where it says he washed us from our sins in verse 5, the older manuscripts say he freed us from our sins. A reference to the Passover.

Freed us from our sins by his blood. And he made us kings and priests. Well that's not quite as good as the kingdom of priests found in the older manuscripts that are actually in Greek.

Now let me say something about this. Because it says grace to you and peace in verse 4 from. Now usually the epistles of Paul or Peter say grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well John goes one better. He sends greetings from the whole trinity it would appear. The first person that he sends greetings from is spoken of as he who is and who was and who is to come.

Now that last line who is to come seems like it might be a reference to Jesus because of the second coming of Jesus we anticipate. However Jesus is mentioned separately in verse 5 and from Jesus Christ. So he who is and was and is to come is not Jesus but is rather probably the Father is intended here.

Because Jesus is mentioned separately later. Now that means that the phrase is to come really means something like is to be. And that is how some translations will render it.

God is the one who was, who is and is to be. That is the unchanging one. In fact at the burning bush when God gave his name to Moses and said what we traditionally read as I am.

That I am. There are some translators who believe those Hebrew words should be translated I am he who is. And if that is true there is an echo of that verse in Exodus right here.

From him who is and who was and is to come. That is the Father. And from the seven spirits of God who are before his throne.

This is thought by most to be a reference to the Holy Spirit. Whether it is or not no one can say for sure. The seven spirits of God are mentioned four or five times in the book of Revelation.

And each time they are mentioned it muddies the water more. It is never explained who they are. For example in chapter five when it talks about the seven eyes on the lamb who is Christ.

It says these seven eyes are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the world. So the eyes on Jesus are the seven spirits but Jesus does not really have seven eyes. So do they really not exist these seven spirits? How are we to understand this? The seven spirits are mentioned a number of times without ever clearing up who is intended by that term.

And so theories may abound but the common theory of most commentators, I cannot do better myself, is that this is simply a term for the spirit of God himself. And usually the cross reference that is given to make the seven spirits be a reference to the Holy Spirit is back to Isaiah chapter 11 in verse 2. In Isaiah chapter 11 verse 2 there is reference to the spirit of the Lord. And he is referred to here as the spirit of the Lord and six other designations.

He is the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. So there are seven ways in which the Holy Spirit is spoken here. He is the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of might, the spirit of knowledge, the spirit of the fear of the Lord.

So he is described in Isaiah 11 verse 2 and that is the best that scholars can do to try to make sense of the seven spirits of God. Obviously it is not all that satisfying because it does not say the seven fold spirit of God, it says the seven spirits of God. And yet if this is a reference to the Holy Spirit, which is just about the only theory that has ever really been seriously entertained by commentators, then we can see how symbolic the language is because we know there is only one Holy Spirit and to depict him as seven spirits perhaps it might mean the Holy Spirit in all of his complete manifestation or something like that since the number seven would be completeness.

It is difficult to know how John, or more properly the Holy Spirit himself who inspired this, intended us to take that phrase, the seven spirits, but suffice it to say, unless someone can come up with a better theory, I am going to go with the default that most commentators do. I am not all that happy with it, but there is no theory I am happier with, so I am going to say that is the Holy Spirit. And if so, then we have had mention of the Father and of the Holy Spirit and then comes Jesus.

So we have got all the members of the Trinity here and Jesus is elaborated on. There are three titles that are given to Jesus and each of them serves, I believe, a pastoral purpose. If the churches that are receiving this letter are suffering, then like most times when Christians suffer, and we may not know much about this, because we haven't suffered very much in this country, although each of us has had his own personal sufferings, you know that when you are a Christian and you are suffering, especially if you are suffering for doing the right thing, if it seems like the church is being attacked and the enemies are winning, there are several questions that come to mind.

One of them is, is God really on the throne still? And is he really in charge or are these enemies in charge? It doesn't seem like what is going on is what God would want, so is there someone really in charge of the situation other than God? And Jesus is mentioned here in three designations that more or less answer the cry of the heart of the suffering churches. He is mentioned first of all as the faithful witness and as such he is the one who has been faithful unto death. Jesus calls us to be faithful unto death as he does for example in chapter 2 verse 10 to the church of Samaria, he says be faithful unto death.

His exhortation to them is be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life, but he has earlier said to them in verse 8, these things says the first the last who was dead and came to life. Now Jesus is the faithful witness who died for his testimony. And therefore he tells us to be prepared to die for our testimony.

The one who is facing martyrdom is to remember Jesus that he died for his faithfulness. He bore witness in a dangerous situation before Pontius Pilate and got himself killed there. And so if he did then we shouldn't think it strange if that's what must happen to us.

He is also called the firstborn from the dead. This is not the only time Jesus is called that. Paul also uses that expression in Colossians 1.18. Jesus is the firstborn or the first begotten from the dead.

What does that mean? It means he was born or came to life from the dead. He was resurrected. In saying the firstborn from the dead it means he is not the only one but just the first one.

It suggests that as Jesus came out of the grave so will others later. Who? Well obviously us. And therefore calling him the firstborn from the dead it's informing people, reminding them who may face death themselves as he did for being a faithful witness and they may die that way.

Well he died but he rose. In other words even though he faced what we might call martyrdom he was vindicated anyway. Which is encouraging because we might face martyrdom.

And it's nice to think that we would be vindicated. But if someone said but Jesus was vindicated because he's God. I'm just an ordinary schmuck.

If I die how do I have any hope that I'll be resurrected? Well Jesus was the firstborn from the dead. He's just the first one not the last one. In another similar phraseology in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul refers to Jesus as the first fruits of those who slept.

That is again the first fruits are the beginning of a more general harvest. The firstborn is the beginning of a family of many children. And so first fruits of those who slept means the first one to spring up from the ground after being planted, the first resurrected one.

Firstborn from the dead has the same meaning. It means that he rose but not him alone. He's going to bring others in his train.

Others will rise. Those who are faithful unto death will be given a crown of life. They'll be crowned with resurrection as he was.

So he was the faithful witness as he's calling them to be. He's the firstborn from the dead meaning they too will rise from the dead if they're faithful unto death. And he's the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Answering the question is God still in control? Yeah, he actually is. The kings of the earth may be the ones who appear to be persecuting the church but he's the ruler over them. He's the

king of the kings and the lord of the lords.

And therefore in mentioning these things about Jesus and there are many other things that could have been mentioned instead, this selection of reminders about Jesus seems to be calculated to encourage those facing the challenge of martyrdom for their faithful witness. Jesus did it first. He's not asking you to do anything he wouldn't do.

He was faithful unto death bearing witness. You must be too. He rose from the dead but he's not alone.

He's just the firstborn from the dead. You will be in that family of resurrected ones too. And he is the ruler of the rulers of the earth so that they really are not the ones in charge.

They seem to be in power. They seem to be doing their will against the church at this time but they are not really. They are doing nothing but what he permits them to do because he's the one who's sovereign over the rulers.

And that is really something that in almost any kind of trials, the sovereignty of God is probably the one thing more than any other that Christians need to be reminded of. It's in other words saying God's still in control. He's in charge.

He's the ruler. He's sovereign. He's still in control.

In almost any trial, in almost any test where we are tempted to be discouraged, simply to remember God's in control is all that is usually necessary to instill the kind of courage we need. That things haven't spun out of God's control. He's still very much at the helm even if it doesn't look like it.

Then it says of Jesus that he loved us and washed us or freed us from our sins in his own blood and has made us a kingdom of priests. A better rhetoric from the better manuscripts on this. To his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Then it says, behold he is coming with clouds and every eye will see him and they also who pierced him and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. Even so, amen.

Now this statement is sort of a theme statement of the book. It's meaning, however, cannot be assumed to be on the surface necessarily. To me, I always read this meaning, okay, the second coming.

He's going to come with clouds in the sky, all the people of the earth are going to see him and in chagrin, those who have not served him and have not believed him, they're going to mourn. But we have to be careful about this thing because the word comes. Behold he comes.

He is coming with the clouds is not necessarily a term that always refers to the second coming. In the book of Revelation, we will find that when he writes to the seven churches, many of them are told that he's going to come to them. By the way, all those churches are gone now, except

for the church of Philadelphia or Smyrna.

Both of them might exist. Ismyr is Smyrna today in Turkey and there is a small congregation there. I've heard mixed reports of whether Philadelphia has one.

But five of the seven, at least, have been extinct for a very long time. If Jesus comes today, he's not coming to them. They're not there.

But he did apparently come to them in whatever sense he meant. But you can even tell by the instances of it, of the occurrence of this promise or threat, that he's not talking about his second coming in many cases. In chapter 2, when he's talking to the church of Ephesus, in verse 2-5, he says, Remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you.

This is the coming of Christ, but not the second coming of Christ, not what we call the second coming. He says, I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place and bless you to repent. Moving the lampstand means he's going to snuff out the light of that church.

That church is gone. It's gone now. He must have done it.

He must have come and done that because it's gone. That lampstand is no longer there. But that was him coming to them.

Now, in other very well-known cases, in chapter 3, when he's talking to the church of Laodicea, in verse 20, he says, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him. So Jesus comes to them too, but in a very different sense.

Here, he's not removing their lampstand. He's coming into them to dine with them and so forth. We take this generally to mean his indwelling presence.

He's going to come, perhaps in his Holy Spirit, and dwell inside. And yet, the same words. I will come.

I will come. I will come. In some of the churches in between those two, we just read promises to the first and the last of those churches.

In between, sometimes he says, I will come and fight with you with the sword out of my mouth. He says that to the church of Pergamos. In verse 16 of chapter 2, Repent or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

That church is gone too. There's no church there. Not even a city there.

Now, he must have come and fought against them, but it wasn't the second coming of Christ. Many times, the coming of Christ or of God in the Bible is figurative. It doesn't always mean what we think of as the second coming.

When Jesus sent out the disciples in Matthew 10, two by two, He said, now you go into certain cities, you preach the kingdom is at hand. If they receive you, stay there for a while and preach some more. If they don't receive you, stamp the dust off your feet, leave that and go to the next village.

He says, because you will not have gone to all the villages of Israel until the Son of Man comes. Now, how long would it take to go to all the villages of Israel? Not 2,000 years. He's saying you need to hasten because the Son of Man is going to come before you get this job done.

Well, if he's talking about a second coming, I dare say 2,000 years is more than enough to visit all the villages of Israel. He couldn't very easily have been talking about that, it seems to me. So, what does he mean before the Son of Man comes? That verse, by the way, was of Matthew 10, 23.

Or, take Matthew 16 and verse 28. Matthew 16, 28. Jesus said to his disciples, Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Now, those people are all dead now. But he said some of them would not die before they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. If you look at Matthew 24, which we have observed has similarities to Revelation, the Olivet Discourse, He says in verse 30, Matthew 24, 30.

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then the tribes of the earth will mourn. Hey, that sounds like Revelation 1, 7. All the tribes of the earth will mourn. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

That's what Revelation 1, 7 says. I'm coming on the clouds. Every eye will see him.

Those who pierce him, the tribes of the earth will mourn. Both Revelation 1, 7 and Matthew 24, verse 30 are echoing a verse in Zechariah 12, 10. They will look upon him whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only begotten Son.

And it says that all the tribes of the earth will mourn. Now, the thing about this Matthew 24, 30 is that a few verses later, Jesus says, Matthew 24, 34, Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled. Now, they're going to see the Son of Man coming on clouds, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and that's going to happen in that generation? That's what Jesus said, and it's the same prediction he made in chapter 16, verse 28.

Some of you standing here will not taste death before you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. This was not the second coming. It was something else.

Now, scholars have different opinions as to what it was. Some scholars think that the prediction in Matthew 16 was fulfilled at the Mount of Transfiguration. Maybe, but the same prediction was then made later, after the Mount of Transfiguration, in Matthew 24.

It must have been something out beyond that. Let me show you another verse. In Isaiah, chapter 19, verse 1. This chapter of Isaiah is a prophecy against Egypt, and as you can tell when you read through it, it's about the Assyrian invasion.

The Assyrians invaded Egypt in the 8th century BC. This prophecy predicts it. And this is how it begins in chapter 19, verse 1. Isaiah 19, verse 1. The burden against Egypt.

Behold, Yahweh rides on a swift cloud and will come into Egypt. So, Yahweh is coming on a cloud? To Egypt? What actually did happen to Egypt? The Assyrian armies came to Egypt. It was a judgment from God.

God sent them. It was God's judgment on the Egyptians, engineered through the armies of the Assyrians. Because it was God's judgment, it is said that God came.

God came on the cloud and destroyed them. Now, God didn't literally ride clouds, and didn't, in a visible sense, come into Egypt. But it's the same language that we read of Jesus.

Behold, he's coming with a cloud. And Jesus said that would happen in that generation. So, when we come to Revelation 1-7, it says, Behold, he's coming with clouds, and every eye will see him.

Is this talking about what we at first think it's talking about? Now, what about this business at the end of Revelation 1-7? All the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. Well, that comes from Zechariah 12-10. But the word earth can, as I've told you before, be translated land.

Tribes of the earth are tribes of the land. Either translation is equally valid. However, one makes more sense.

The earth generally is not divided into tribes, but nations. The Bible does speak frequently about all the nations of the earth. All the nations of the world.

But the tribes usually refer to the 12 tribes of Israel. The 12 tribes of the land. Of Israel, that would be.

And therefore, this might not be referring to any global situation at all. All the tribes of Israel in the land will mourn when they see Jerusalem fall, perhaps. Could that be the thing that happened before some of those stand their taste of death? That Jesus spoke about? Is that the thing that happened in that generation? Could be.

Could be. At least it is on the table as a possibility. It wouldn't be if we were not familiar with apocalyptic imagery.

And if we weren't familiar with the way that the word coming is used non-literally. Even in the book of Revelation. He comes to Ephesus and takes away their lives.

And he comes to those in Laodicea who hear him knocking and he comes to them. He comes to

the church of Pergamum and fights with them with a sword for his mouth. These are figures.

This is not literal. Now you might say, well then how can you even know if there's going to be a literal second coming at all? Well, because it is spoken of as an event in certain passages that are not in symbolic books. Books like the epistles which are not written in apocalyptic imagery.

And it is said to be accompanied by things that have not yet happened. Like the resurrection of the dead. The second coming of Christ which is still future.

Jesus will come back. It says in Acts chapter 1. This Jesus whom you have seen going to heaven will come back in like manner. As you have seen him go.

He ascended, he will also descend in the same way. He will raise the dead the scripture says. These things have not yet happened.

That's future. But there are references to judgments. Which follow the Hebrew idiom in the Old Testament and the New.

Which speaks of judgment coming on a nation or on a land. As God coming in judgment upon them or a visitation from God. And so when Jesus says as the theme of the book, I'm coming with the clouds.

This may be the second coming. That would make this book about the end times and the end of the world. Or it may be something that will happen in that generation as Jesus said it would.

Jesus said they'll see the Son of Man coming with the clouds of glory. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn. That's the same thing said right here.

Only Jesus when he said it, said it will happen in that generation. So we have to, if we're going to let Jesus speak for himself on this. At least take seriously that this might be referring to something that happened a long time ago.

This does not mean there is no future second coming. It just means that this isn't talking about that. But this is talking about something else.

Using very common prophetic language. Now verse 8, I am the Alpha and the Omega. You probably know those are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

And therefore it's like I'm the A and the Z. Suggesting that he encompasses all that is in between. He's everything. He's the beginning and the end says the Lord.

Who is, who was and who is to come. The Almighty. Now Jesus is the one who is and was and is to come.

And yet the one who is and was and who is to come in verse 4 was distinguished from Jesus. And seems most likely to be a reference to the Father. So is this person who is speaking the

Father? He does say he's the Almighty.

When you talk to Jehovah's Witnesses about the subject of Jesus being God or not. They always say well it does say in Isaiah he's the Mighty God. But it doesn't say he's the Almighty God.

Only Jehovah is the Almighty God. Jesus is just a Mighty God they say. But here whoever is speaking is the Almighty God.

And says so unambiguously. How do we know who this is? Is this the Father speaking or is it Jesus? Well he's the Alpha, he's the Omega, the beginning and the end. Actually in the Old Testament Yahweh in Isaiah is called the first and the last.

And that expression is added to these ones later in this chapter. When you look at verse 18. John sees a person whom we will have to describe and identify.

And he was so impressed he fell on his face like a dead man. And at the end of verse 17 he put his hand on me saying to me do not be afraid I am the first and the last. As I said this expression the first and the last is actually a reference in Isaiah 41.4 and Isaiah 44.6 and Isaiah 48.12 to Yahweh.

Yahweh calls himself the first and the last. But he goes on and says I am he who lives and was dead and behold I am alive forevermore. Amen.

And I have the keys of Hades and death. Now here's the problem. When did Yahweh ever die? He says I lived but I was dead but I live now again.

This cannot be mistaken for anyone other than Jesus. And yet he's using the titles that Yahweh uses for himself. The first and the last.

He's the beginning and the end. He's the Alpha and the Omega. He is the Almighty in verse 8. And in verse 18 he says he had died and risen again.

These two verses together are devastating to any argument that would say that Jesus is anything other than Yahweh. The terms that are already applied to the Father in verse 4 are reapplied to Jesus in verse 8. The one who is, who was and is to come is the Father in verse 4 but is Jesus in verse 8. The first and the last in verse 17, a term for Yahweh in the Old Testament, is Jesus, the one who died and is alive again. So the identification of Jesus with God in this is unmistakable.

And that's why we say that Revelation has what we call a high Christology, higher than most books because it really does depict Christ as God himself. Although, like the rest of the Bible, it also distinguishes him between him and God. And this is the mystery.

This is the mystery in Revelation and elsewhere. When John is caught up into heaven and sees the one on the throne holding the book, that's obviously God the Father. And then the Lamb shows up and the book is handed to him.

That's obviously Jesus. There is a distinction between the one on the throne and the Lamb. And yet there's identity also.

How so? Well, I'll leave it to you to work it out. I go more or less with the standard Trinity definition. But it's not sacrosanct.

You know, the standard Trinity definition was worked out in 325 by a bunch of bishops. They might have gotten it right. They could be right.

I don't have any serious problem with the way they explained it. It could be true. But we have to realize their explanation is not inspired.

They were just doing what we all have to do. Taking all the scriptures on this subject and trying to make sense of a very confusing thing. Sometimes Jesus is identified with the Father.

Sometimes he's distinguished from Him. Obviously, in one sense, He is the Father. In another sense, He's not.

So that we see in Isaiah 9.6, unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. And the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father. This child is called the Everlasting Father? There seems to be identity.

And yet Jesus says, the Father is greater than I. So here we have a mystery. If I wished, I could tell you everything I think about it. And I would.

But then I wouldn't be able to tell you what I think about the book of Revelation. So we have to choose our battles here. So I leave it to you to sort it out.

But I believe the Trinity is, in one sense or another, the correct explanation. There are people who've gone with modalism, where the Father becomes the Son, who becomes the Holy Spirit. There's only one person, not three, but He changes, wears different hats, so to speak.

That's generally considered a heresy. It's another attempt to explain this mystery. How could Jesus be the Father and not be the Father? But the Trinity, I think, answers the data of Scripture far better than any other theory.

They are one in substance, two in person. What does that mean? I don't think anyone knows. It's just the way we talk about it, to act like we've sorted it out.

Okay? But Jesus clearly claims to be God in this passage. Now, verse 9, And I, John, both your brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. In other words, I'm a preacher.

I was preaching. I got in trouble. I had to go to jail.

I was on the island of Patmos. He says, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. Now, the Lord's day is a term used only here in Scripture, but used frequently by the Church Fathers, whether it's used the same way in Scripture as by the Church Fathers is not certain.

But the Church Fathers in the early Church used the term the Lord's day to refer to Sunday, the first day of the week. And they called it that because it was the day that the tomb of Jesus was discovered to be empty. And he appeared, resurrected from the dead, to the disciples on the first day of the week.

And that was more important to them than the Sabbath. So they began to observe Sunday as the Lord's day. Saturday was still called the Sabbath.

Throughout the book of Acts, they still called Saturday the Sabbath. But Sunday eventually became the primary day that Christians gathered for worship. And in the second century, they referred to Sunday as the Lord's day.

Now, John uses the expression here, the Lord's day. And I guess we don't know for sure whether he's using it the same way that it was later used. But if he is not, I can't think of any other way he would be using it.

Now, my former pastor said, well, this line, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. He said, well, that can be translated, I was in the Spirit unto the day of the Lord. And what he meant by that is he was carried into the future to the second coming, to the day of the Lord, at the end of the age, in the Spirit.

Perhaps as Ezekiel was in the Spirit, he was carried from Babylon. The Spirit picked him up by the hair of his head, lifted him up and carried him to Jerusalem, which is short of vision. That is what my former pastor, who is a dispensationalist and a futurist, thought.

And he was saying, I was in the Spirit, carried off to the day of the Lord, meaning the end of the age. Well, it could be the day of the Lord, it may not be the end of the age. It may be that it was the day of the Lord against Jerusalem.

The day of the Lord is an expression often found in the Old Testament. And it's always a day of judgment. And it can be on any nation.

It can be the day of the Lord on Moab. It can be the day of the Lord on Babylon. It can be the day of the Lord on Assyria.

It can be the day of the Lord on Egypt. The day of the Lord was the day of judgment. Not always the same day, but for any given nation, the day of judgment for them was the day that the Lord settled the score that he had with them.

And it was the day of the Lord for them. If John is saying, I was carried by the Spirit unto the day of the Lord, this wouldn't necessarily mean the end of the world day of the Lord. It could be the

day of the Lord on Jerusalem or any other judgment day for any other people.

In any case, I'm happy enough to go with what most commentators say, that he's probably referring to Sunday here. And he was in the Spirit. If it was Sunday, there's a good chance that he knew that his congregation back home in Ephesus was gathering to worship.

He was exiled, he couldn't be with them. Perhaps longing for Ephesus, that was his home church. It was just across a little bit of water.

I think it was about 27 miles offshore from here, 40 miles offshore, I don't remember. But Paphos was not very far from Ephesus, from the mainland, but it was so near yet so far. When you're in exile, you're in prison.

And on this Sunday morning, it may be that he was reflecting on the fact that his friends back home were probably getting together about now. And as he thought about it, it may be, and it'd be hard for him not to think about it, I would think, on such an occasion. He hears a voice.

He says, I heard behind me, verse 10, a loud voice as of a trumpet saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. Now, by the way, in the previous statement, in verse 8, he said, I'm the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Now, instead of beginning and end, it's first and last.

And only there do we introduce, actually, the expression Isaiah uses for Yahweh. Isaiah doesn't call Yahweh the beginning and the end, or the Alpha and the Omega. It's the first and the last.

We didn't have that included in verse 8, but now we do. The same person who spoke in verse 8 is now the first and the last, a title of Yahweh. And what you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia.

He names the particular ones. To Ephesus. Now, that, if John, in fact, was homesick for his home church in Ephesus, it perhaps sparked his interest.

Oh, we've got, Jesus is going to be sending a letter to my home church. I get to take dictation and send it to them. That's the first one.

To Smyrna, which is modern Izmir in Turkish. To Pergamos, or Pergamum, modern translations usually say. To Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, to Laodicea.

That's the seven. They are listed in a logical order. If you follow a map, you'll find that Ephesus, of these churches, would be the most southwesterly of them.

And Smyrna was to the north. And as you would follow the churches as they are listed, you'd move northward, then eastward, then down southward, in a horseshoe shape. It was the natural route that a postal carrier might carry a letter from town to town.

And so, most commentators believe that this is listed in the order that the churches would

receive them, in the natural progression of carrying a letter in that region to the various cities. And so, he writes a circular epistle. Apparently, most of the book of Revelation is for all seven churches to read, but each one receives its own little individual message, also, as we shall see in chapters 2 and 3. Not tonight, I assure you.

Verse 12, Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me, and having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. Interesting, he didn't see first the person, but the golden lampstands. And in the midst of the seven lampstands, one like the Son of Man.

I don't know if this is intentional, but the seven lampstands, you know, are the seven churches, as we shall see in verse 20. And when he turned to see and hear the voice of God, he didn't first see Jesus, he first saw the church. And it may be that this is trying to communicate that if you want to hear the voice of Christ, if you want to see Jesus, you're more likely, first of all, to have to see the church.

It's there that he dwells, it's there where he speaks. Now, when the Bible uses the term church, we shouldn't mistake it to mean what we think of as church necessarily. We've got 2,000 years of tradition here that the so-called church has been morphing into something very unlike what the original was.

After all, I don't think any of us here think that the medieval church, the Roman Catholic church conducting inquisitions and crusades and so forth, that that's the same thing that John or Jesus would have called the church. The church is the body of Christ. It's the bride of Christ.

The church is the community of Christ on the earth. It's obvious that many things have been called church that are not that. Certainly, we acknowledge that in the Middle Ages, although we sometimes think that since the Reformation, it all got recovered again.

Now, what we have and what we call church is the same thing they had back then. That is not something we should take for granted. We should assume nothing.

We've had 2,000 years of tradition, and even the Reformation didn't shed very much of the innovations that the Roman Catholic church had brought in. Only a few were shed. And so, as we think about the church, we're talking not about the institutions that we call churches.

We're talking about the community of believers who are born again, followers of Jesus Christ, disciples, collectively seeing. God looks on the earth. He sees us all.

And he sees a city, a New Jerusalem. He sees a nation. He sees a kingdom.

He sees something that we don't see with our eyes. But it exists, and we are part of it. And this is where Jesus is found.

Jesus is found in his people. He dwells in his people. He dwells in the tabernacle that he's established, which is the church, a temple built from living stone.

And so, John turns to hear Jesus' voice, and what he first encounters is the church itself, the seven churches. And then, within the seven churches, among them, he sees Jesus. That's where Jesus meets him, through his people, through his community.

And I saw the seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the seven lampstands, one like the Son of Man. It's interesting he didn't say, I saw the Son of Man.

When John had known Jesus, personally, of course, had been very close to him, he could say, I saw Jesus, and I recognized him right off. It was him. It was the Son of Man.

Instead, he's a little more cautious. He says, I saw one that was like the Son of Man. And this itself may suggest that this was the angel that Jesus sent to speak on his behalf, who resembled him.

I don't know. Or maybe it's just a matter of speaking, and it really was Jesus. We know that the speaking is the message of Jesus.

The things spoken by this messenger are the words of Jesus. Whether it was Jesus appearing to John himself, or the angel that we were told about, that Jesus sent his angel to John, this is never explained fully. I just find it interesting that it says that what he saw was one like the Son of Man, when he could have, as a personal friend of Jesus, I saw the Son of Man.

I saw Jesus. After all, when Stephen was being stoned, he saw the heavens open, and he said, I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. He didn't say, I see one like the Son of Man.

The expression Son of Man could be a Son of Man. And one like a Son of Man would be just a human form. Someone who's like a human.

That's actually the term that Daniel used. In Daniel 7, verses 12 and 13, he says, I saw one like a Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven to the ancient days. And John may be replicating that expression.

It's very possible. Anyway, I'm not going to go on the record to say this was or wasn't Jesus himself. I'll say that I've always figured it was.

Because everything he says is Jesus talking. Whether it's Jesus appearing and talking, or Jesus talking through an angel, who knows, any more than the angel of the Lord, obviously, is the Lord talking. These things do not have to be resolved for my satisfaction.

Maybe for yours. You're going to have to get it from someone other than me. Because I don't know.

This description of the one like a Son of Man, or the Son of Man, was clothed with a garment down to the feet, girded around about the chest with a golden band. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes like a flame of fire. His feet were like fine brass,

as if refined in a furnace, and his voice as the sound of many waters.

He had in his right hand the seven stars, and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was like the sun, shining in its strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said to me, Do not be afraid.

I am the first and the last. I am he who lives and was dead. And behold, I am alive forevermore.

Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and death. Now, the description of this person follows very closely, point by point, with only a few deviations.

The description of a man that Daniel saw in Daniel chapter 10. He had been fasting and praying for 21 days, and finally a messenger from heaven appeared to him and gave him information. And the description that Daniel gives of this man before we hear anything that he said is what we find in Daniel 10, 5 and 6. It says, I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man, clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with the gold of Ephaz, his body was like burial, his face like the appearance of lightning, and his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.

Now, almost everything in that has its own, its parallel in Revelation, although Revelation has some additional points, like the seven stars in his hand and such. But the linen robe, the gold. Now, what's interesting here is in Daniel chapter 10, verse 5, his waist was girded with gold of Ephaz.

In Revelation, the golden girdle was over his shoulders or across his chest. Some commentators have thought that as the girdle was used, that is, the sash was used to gird up the skirts of the garment when a person was doing their work, that when he was done with his work, he'd take off that girdle and throw it across his chest, over his shoulder, and walk home with his work completed. And that here in the Old Testament, Jesus still has his girdle on because his work is not complete, but by the time Revelation comes, he's already finished his work, as Hebrews tells us, and now he's just throwing his girdle across his chest, and he's now just, it's not being used anymore.

Others have argued that the girdle across the chest is actually bound around the chest, just as it would normally be around the waist, and that high-ranking dignitaries wore their girdles higher on their chest, it was sort of a mark of rank. I don't know which commentators are right. You know, the commentators always like to bring in all kinds of cultural claims.

Oh, this is a reference to this thing that was done in the Roman Empire. And boy, is it hard to find the documentation anywhere except in the commentaries. You know, the commentators, I guess, expect us to trust that they are the documentation, but I would prefer to find... I guess I've seen too many preachers and Christian writers pass along a rumor as true, and then later find out there's actually no... there's no original sources for this, you know.

Someone came up with it in a sermon, thought it was a good idea, and then it got passed along

as if it was a fact, and then forever after, it's in the commentary. I really don't know why the difference. The girdle is around the waist in Daniel, it's across the chest in Revelation, so there's different explanations that have been given.

But one thing is clear, the features describing him are those of Daniel chapter 10. And therefore, many have felt it's safe to say that the man who appeared to Daniel was, in fact, Christ in his preexistent form. But we should realize this, that in all likelihood, this was a visionary experience rather than a physical man standing there who looked like this.

A sword coming out of his mouth obviously would represent his words. It's a symbolic thing. If there's really a big sword coming out of his mouth, he better stand back when he turns his head.

The idea that there was really this physical phenomenon rather than it being a vision that he had on the island of Patmos seems unlikely. For example, we find that when John falls on his face as one dead, that Jesus, or the angel, or whoever it is, takes his right hand and puts it on John's head. Well, he had the stars in his right hand.

What happened to them now? The stars in his right hand symbolize him holding the stars, which he explains in verse 20. But it's a symbolic thing, I think. I believe that it's a vision.

I don't think Jesus stood there physically. I don't think when we see Jesus that we'll see him described like this. Any more than when he saw Jesus in chapter 5 as a lamb with seven eyes and seven horns, I don't think that is literal either.

I think that John has seen visions that symbolically depicted that. And these characteristics that are described, I think, symbolize things that are true about Jesus. His hair white as wool suggests old age or wisdom.

The hoary head is the crown of glory if it's found in the way of righteousness, it says in Proverbs. His eyes were like a flame of fire, piercing vision. His feet like bronze.

Now, his feet are used later to trample on the grapes in judgment. Therefore, his bronze feet are like unbreakable judgment trampling upon the wicked. Different things apparently have different meanings.

The long white robe down to his feet is what priests wore. Not many people wore robes down to their feet. It wasn't very practical for walking or for working.

But the priests wore long robes down to their feet. So, he's got a garment down to his feet. He may be in a priestly garment for all we know.

There's quite a few different features here of Jesus that one could imagine representing certain things. Their identity and their meaning would be speculative in some measure. But anyway, John falls down paralyzed with fear, apparently.

And we'll just call it Jesus. He speaks to him and says, I am the first, the last, and so forth. He puts his hand on his head and he says to him, I have the keys of Hades and death.

Now, Hades and death are going to be characters in the drama beginning in chapter 6. The fourth horseman is death. And he's followed by a runner named Hades. And so, we're going to have a symbolic drama where death and Hades figure in it.

And in the end, death and Hades are going to be thrown into the lake of fire with all the other bad guys. We're going to have a personification of these things. Death is, of course, we know what death is.

It's when you stop living. Hades is where the dead go. So, death and Hades represent the great enemy of man, the wages of sin.

That which intruded into God's creation when man sinned and which should never have come in the first place, which the devil brought about by tempting Adam and Eve. And therefore, death came. Now, death and Hades can be unlocked because Jesus has the keys.

Preachers love to give all kinds of imaginative scenarios about this. A very common one that people have heard preachers say is that when Jesus died, he went down to Hades and he confronted the devil who had the keys to death in Hades and he grabbed the keys from the devil and he emerged from the grave holding the keys that he had seized from the devil. Now, the Bible doesn't ever say that the devil holds keys, although, of course, he is referred to as one who has the power of death in Hebrews 2.14. But this idea that Jesus went down to Hades and got the keys is nowhere really taught.

I mean, that's adding a lot of trappings to a story that is never told in the Bible. The Bible doesn't tell what Jesus did when he died and during those three days. But he does at this point say he has the keys of death in Hades.

Now, keys open locks, which means that if you are on his side, he could open the gates of Hades and you could escape. You could rise from the dead, in other words. If you die, he can let you out of death in Hades.

He opens and no man shuts. And he shuts and no man opens. He'll tell one of the churches in chapter 3. And he has these keys.

He determines who will live and die. He determines who will be in hell and who will be in heaven or whatever. It's he's the one who's determining fates beyond the grave.

This is the point here. He's got the keys. The keys represent the authority to lock or to unlock.

Now, you might remember an interesting statement that Jesus made that is taken a lot of different ways by different people. Jesus said when he spoke to Peter in Matthew chapter 16, he says, You are Peter, upon this rock I'll build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail

against it. Why will the gates of Hades not prevail? Well, Jesus has the keys.

He can open them. What are the gates of Hades? Many people, without thinking, say, Well, this just means that the church will never be overrun by the devil. Because actually in the King James Version, Hades was translated as hell.

So it said the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. And most people thought that meant that under all the attacks that the church must undergo and must endure from hell, from the devil, the enemy will not prevail. The church will stand and withstand it all.

And then, of course, there's a group of people who look more carefully at the passage and say, Wait a minute. It doesn't say anything about the church being attacked. It talks about the gates of Hades will not withstand the church.

The church is attacking Hades. In those days, a walled city would close the gates. And that would keep out the enemy, maybe.

But what if the enemy is strong enough to overcome the gates and the gates don't prevail? Well, then Hades is invaded. So I remember growing up under the teaching and the impression that Jesus was saying the church will survive all the attacks against it. Then I looked at it more closely, as did some others, and said, Wait a minute.

It's saying that Hades will not survive the attacks against it by the church. But in all of this time, it never occurred to me that there's no reason in the world to associate the kingdom of darkness with Hades. It was because of the King James Version, the gates of hell.

We think of the devil, he's the lord of hell, isn't he? He's the one that's, you know, the gates of hell, that's his domain. But is it? Where in the Bible is Satan ever associated with Hades? He doesn't go there. He doesn't live there.

He doesn't control anything there. Satan is never mentioned in the same breath with Hades. Hades is not about Satan.

It's not about the powers of darkness. It's not about the demons. It's about people dead.

People who die go to Hades. That's the only thing the Bible says about Hades. It's the place of the dead.

So how is it that the gates of the place of the dead will not prevail against the church? Only if it means that the church, Christians, having died, will not be confined and trapped there permanently. In Isaiah, it talks about how Hades, or Sheol, in the Old Testament, same thing, has opened its jaws to receive those who are being judged and dying. The gates of Hades, the jaws of death, the jaws of Hades, they swallow up everybody.

Everybody dies. And everyone ends up locked into that prison of death and Hades. But Jesus has the key to that prison door.

He can let people out. He can resurrect the dead. The gates of Hades prevail against everyone except the church.

Because only the church is serving the Lord who has the keys and can let out the dead at the time of the resurrection. That's what I think is referred to here. It's talking about resurrection, not spiritual warfare.

I have used that verse, the gates of Hades will not prevail against us, many times in talking about spiritual warfare. And I have to say, in recent years, I've drawn back and said, is that really justified? Where is the word Hades ever associated with the enemy's territory? It isn't. The devil is not associated with Hades in the Bible.

Death is. And of course, he's associated with death, but that's not a direct link to Hades as the domain of Satan or under his control. I guess one could think of it that way, but that's not how the Bible speaks of it.

Now, verse 19, write the things which you have seen, the things which are, the things which will take place after this. In the Greek, the last line is the things that are about to take place after this. Three categories.

The things he has seen, well, that's what he had seen up to that point, the vision, and he does record it in chapter one. So he wrote what he had seen right there in chapter one. Then the things which are, that is contemporary things in his day.

Well, no doubt chapters two and three, those were current events, current state of the churches, the word that God had to the churches about what they needed to do differently. But the things which must take place after this or the things that are about to take place after this will be future things, after John's day. So there are three categories.

The things he had seen, that's recorded in chapter one. The things which are, that's the condition of the seven churches in chapters two and three. And the things that are about to take place after this begins at chapter four and runs through the rest of the book.

And by the way, if you look at chapter four, verse one, it says, after these things, I looked and behold, the door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking to me, saying, come up here and I will show you things which must take place after this. The same phrase, metatauta in the Greek, after these things.

So the third category that he's to write is the things that will take place, metatauta, after these things. And in chapter four, verse one, the voice says, come up, I'll show you things that are going to happen, metatauta, after these things. So it's at that point John begins to write the things that would be future from his point of view.

So in a sense, chapter one, verse 19, provides an outline for the book. Three categories, three things to write, and he wrote them all in the order mentioned. Chapter one fulfills the first

assignment, chapters two and three, the second assignment, and then chapters four through 22 fulfills the final assignment.

Finally, verse 20, the mystery of the seven stars, which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands, which you saw, are the seven churches. Now this is one of the two times that the angel actually explains the mystery. The other time was when he explained the mystery of the seven heads that were seven mountains and seven kings and five of Paul and one now is, and there's an eighth coming, and he's one of the seven, and that was the explanation in chapter 17 of something that was not so confusing until it was explained.

In this case, this is the other case in the book of Revelation where we get the mystery explained. What is the mystery? The mystery is what are those seven stars? What are those lampstands? He says, well here, I'll explain the mystery here. The seven stars, well the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

The second part I can get, I know what churches are. There are seven churches in these seven towns. Okay, the seven lampstands represent the seven churches.

The number seven probably being whole, complete, perhaps in a sense they represent all of the churches. But the other part isn't made any more clear by being told. The seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches.

Well, what is an angel of a church? Is this like a guardian angel over each church? Is this an angel from heaven that is kind of assigned to keep track of each church? We're not told of any such things, thus far in scripture. Is that what we're to imply from this? Not the only possibility, but it is a possibility. The main problem with that is that when the seven letters are addressed to the churches in chapters two and three, in every case, the letter is addressed to the angel of the church.

Take a letter, John, and write to the angel of the church of Ephesus, and to the angel of the church of Smyrna, and to the angel of the church of Pergamon, and so forth. Now, if God wants to communicate with his angels, does he have to send a message through an earthly guy writing a letter to the angels? If these are angels like heavenly angels, why doesn't God have a better communication system to get information to his troops than to go down to some guy on planet Earth and say, write a letter to these angels for me. Okay, where do I address it to? Where do they pick up their mail? This is a difficulty in seeing the seven angels as if they are angels in the sky.

And therefore, most commentators have said, well, the seven angels, I think we should take the angels in the generic sense of the Greek word, angel, means messengers. It is true that most of the time, the word angels in the New Testament does mean heavenly beings that live in heaven with God, supernatural, superhuman spirits. That's the normal, most frequent use of the term, but it is actually a normal Greek word for a messenger.

Even human messengers are called that sometimes. John's messengers they sent from prison to ask Jesus, are you the one who is to come? The Bible refers to them as the ongoloi, the messengers that John sent. They're human.

In other words, the word angel doesn't necessarily mean a superhuman being. It could refer to a human messenger. Therefore, the seven angels could be the seven messengers of the seven churches.

Therefore, almost all commentators, not all, but most, say the seven angels are the seven pastors of the seven churches. But that is a bit of an anachronism too, because it's reading back into the early church what we had in our churches, pastors. We have no evidence in Scripture that any church had what we call a pastor.

In the New Testament, the churches had elderships, and there is no record anywhere in the Bible of any church having a pastor. So the idea that these were seven pastors is reading back into the Bible conditions that developed in later church history, which we're accustomed to, and assuming that it must have been true then too, which the Bible bears no testimony to. On the other hand, even though churches may not have had pastors as we think of them, there might have been somebody who was assigned to read the letters.

There could have been somebody who was assigned to communicate outward information that came into the church, to the church, someone who was a good reader or something like that. He could have been the messenger of the church. We don't know for sure.

Do you hear me saying that a lot? We don't know for sure. Who are the seven spirits? Well, the common view is it's the Holy Spirit. Well, we don't know for sure.

Who are the seven angels? The common view is it's the seven pastors of the church. But we don't know for sure. On almost everything in Revelation, we don't know for sure.

And we just have to get used to that. Although some things will be easier to know when we can start comparing more scripture to scripture and getting a more reliable gauge of interpreting what we're trying to understand. But many things in Revelation, we just have to live with the curiosity.

And I guess it's not essential that we must know the answers. So, there are seven churches represented by the seven lampstands. There are seven angels of the seven churches who are going to be the recipients of the letters and no doubt communicate them to the church.

And that ends the vision. In chapter 2, he begins the letters themselves. That is, Jesus dictates the letters.

In that respect, the seven letters that we find in chapters 2 and 3 are very unique or absolutely unique. And they're the only letters in the Bible dictated by Jesus. These are letters from Jesus to the churches.

Now, of course, all the Word of God is from God in a way, from Jesus. But Paul never claimed that he was writing from Jesus. He said, I'm Paul.

I'll tell you what I know. I'll tell you what I think. I'll tell you what God has shown me.

But he didn't say this is from Jesus. But each of the seven letters said, this is from Him who holds the seven stars. From Him who has the eyes of flame of fire and the feet like furnished bronze.

From Him who is the first and the last. In other words, it's Jesus Himself sending these letters. John is just the scribe.

And so we'll see what those letters contain next time.

OpenTheo

Revelation 2

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In "Revelation 2", Steve Gregg discusses the seven brief epistles in the book of Revelation addressed to the seven churches of Asia. He explains that the letters contain both praise and criticism for each church, and suggests that they are not direct messages from Jesus, but rather portray traits of the churches. He also notes how different Christian denominations interpret the letters, with the historicist viewpoint considering them as a panorama of the entire church age, and dispensational churches seeing them as marking the end of the church age. Overall, Gregg presents a detailed analysis of the letters and their significance in the context of Christianity.

Transcript

All right, we're turning to Revelation chapter 2, and this chapter and the following chapter are, they contain nothing except seven brief epistles, one right after the other, to the seven churches which were in Asia. And once again, the word Asia does not mean in scripture what it means to us. To us, Asia is a continent.

To them, Asia was a province in the Roman Empire. It was essentially the same landmass that we today refer to as Turkey. So all seven of these churches were in the province of Asia, and their ruins, insofar as they can be seen today, are seen in the modern land of Turkey.

These churches were named for us back in chapter 1, verse 11, saying, Jesus said, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, and what you see, John was told, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. As I mentioned in an earlier lecture, there really were more than seven churches in Asia at this time. The book of Acts and the writings of Paul testify to at least three other churches in Asia that existed at this time.

There was a church in Troas, there was a church in Hierapolis, and of course we all know there was a church in Colossae to whom Paul wrote an epistle, Colossians. Those churches were also in Asia Minor, or Asia, but they are not included here. But that seems to be artificial.

Revelation is committed, it would seem, to a series of sevens. There are seven churches, there

are seven seals, there are seven trumpets, there are seven vials, there are seven thunders, there are seven of almost everything that there is anything of. Seven is the number woven through the book, and seven is the number in the Jewish, and apparently the early Christian mind, of perfection and completeness.

So to say the seven churches is no doubt conveying the idea of the whole church, just as when it says that the lamb has seven eyes, it means he sees all things, completeness, perfection. He knows and sees all things. He had seven horns, he has all power.

The number seven functions in this kind of literature not as a statistic or a numerical unit so much as a symbolic code. That means completeness or perfection. So to say seven churches would suggest that the whole church is in view.

Now that would perhaps translate into a suggestion like the following. Most churches, if not all churches of all time, have issues within them that resemble the issues in one or more of these churches. The church of Ephesus is not there anymore today, but there are churches like it to whom Christ's instructions would be as relevant as they were to the original church of Ephesus.

Likewise, the church of Smyrna, the church of Pergamos, the church of Thyatira, and so forth. As you go through these churches, each one has its own issues, problems. Some of the problems are their own fault, and they're called to repent.

Christ raises these things as a complaint against them. Others, their problems are not their fault. They're persecuted for righteousness.

This is true of the church of Smyrna and the church of Philadelphia. So in some cases, the problem is something for the church to repent of. In other cases, their problems are simply circumstances in which Christ intends to encourage them to hang tough and endure to the end and be an overcomer.

Some of these churches are so compromised that we might say they hardly would seem to be churches anymore. Indeed, Christ actually threatens some of them with extinction if they don't shape up. But each of the churches, Christ suggests, may have a remnant within them who are capable of being, as he calls them, overcomers.

To him who overcomes, in each church there are some who overcome or could overcome, and there are promises made to them that even if the whole church around them is morally caving in, compromising, perhaps going to vanish, yet they will have a share in that which is more lasting, that which is eternal, that which is described later in the book of Revelation as the new heavens and the new earth and the new Jerusalem. Most of the promises he makes to the overcomers, well, at least many of them, are borrowed from the imagery of that city, the new Jerusalem at the end of the book of Revelation. These letters are the only letters in the Bible that are dictated by Jesus.

The New Testament contains many epistles to churches. None of them are dictated by Jesus.

The apostle Paul never speaks in his letters as if he is Jesus speaking, except in one brief instance at the end of 2 Corinthians 6, where he actually gives in the space of two or three verses what appears to be an oracle.

He lapsed into giving a prophecy as he's writing and does speak as if he is God, the way a prophet speaks, thus saith the Lord, essentially, is what he says. But most of Paul's letters have nothing of that. It's just I, Paul, an apostle, have these things to say to the church, or Peter or James or John, the writers of the epistles.

But in this case it's I, Jesus. John is just taking dictation for me. John is just my secretary.

I'm Jesus giving you these messages. This is what Jesus thinks. This is a letter from the head of the church, directly.

And while we accept all the letters of the apostles, Paul, Peter, James, John, etc., we accept them all as authoritative and apostolic and certainly worthy of inclusion in our scriptures and authoritative for our faith and practice. Yet they are not, and do not claim to be, direct messages from the brain of Jesus and the mouth of Jesus to the churches as directly as these ones are. This is a unique set of epistles.

They occupy chapters 2 and 3 and thereby they complete the section, which could be, if we're dividing Revelation into sections, the first section would be chapters 1 through 3. Chapters 1 through 3 is concerned about the seven letters of the seven churches. Once you get past chapter 3, there's no more mention of the seven churches. There's something else in mind.

There's a seven-sealed book that has to be broken. The seals have to be broken. The book has to be opened.

And so chapters 4 through 8, essentially, the first verse of chapter 8, are concerned with that. And then from the rest of chapter 8 through chapter 10 or even into 11, we have seven trumpets. And so the book divides into discrete segments in some cases, sections with seven subdivisions.

In this case, it's the seven letters. Each section has sort of an introductory vision, as John gave us an introductory vision in chapter 1. Actually, Jesus gave it to John and he shared it with us. He saw Jesus.

Jesus was stylistically portrayed as having eyes of a flame of fire, feet of bronze, a sword coming out of his mouth, his face shining like the sun, his hair as white as wool, wearing a long robe down to his ankles, and a golden sash or girdle around his chest. And his voice sounded like the voice of many waters. This imagery, as we pointed out last time, was taken almost word for word from Daniel chapter 10.

A divine messenger who came to Daniel looked like this messenger. This messenger, however, speaks as though he is Jesus, and I think we probably should conclude that he is. He says things

that only Jesus could say.

And, therefore, Jesus is appearing and he is walking in the vision in chapter 1 among seven golden lampstands. And he's holding in his hands seven stars. And at the very end of chapter 1, he says, I'll explain the mystery for you.

The seven lampstands are the seven churches. The seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches. And I mentioned that there's almost as much mystery in the explanation as there is before it's explained, because nobody really knows for sure who the seven angels of the seven churches are.

You could have easily just left it at seven stars and we would know as much. But the point here is that the stars and lampstands are both light bearers. Lampstands bear light on earth.

Stars bear light in heaven. And whoever the seven angels of the seven churches are may be a mystery we'll never solve. But on earth, the church is the lamp of God.

The church is the light of the world. And these seven churches, in order that their light might not go out, need some encouragement or some adjustment. That Jesus has a long robe means he's dressed like a priest.

And in the tabernacle or the temple later, the priest would go in and they would attend to the lamps. There was one candelabra with seven lamps on it, a menorah inside the holy place of the temple. And obviously these oil lamps had to be tended.

The oil had to be replaced as it burned. They had to trim the wicks and so forth, make sure the light was not going out. And so Jesus seems to be depicted as a priest in his own house, in his own temple, tending the individual lamps.

And he would the lights that he has lit and maintains on earth. Some of these lights are about to go out and he threatens at least in one case to remove the lamp stand altogether. And so we now have in chapters two and three, what he has to say to each of these churches.

Now, before we look at any of them, and I do not intend to take more than chapter two tonight. So I'll just let you know that we will be fortunate if we get through the first four, which are in chapter two. The other three are in chapter three.

But there's some overall things we might observe. One is that the characteristics of these churches have encouraged some interpreters to see them as a predictive prophecy of the whole age of the church. Now, I'm not going to encourage this interpretation.

I was taught it when I was young and it made sense to me at the time. I was taught Futurism. I was taught Dispensationalism and my Dispensational teachers taught what I'm about to share with you.

I didn't know though that these ideas that I'm about to share originated in a different camp. It

originated in the Historicist camp, which almost gives it a little more credibility because the Historicist camp was the majority view of the Protestant church from the time of the Reformation until Dispensationalism came along. And still well after Dispensationalism arose in 1830, the Historicist view continued to be very prominent among Protestants up until probably the early 20th century.

Now, I'm not a Historicist in my viewpoint, but if you'll recall, the Historicist view holds that the book of Revelation is a panorama of the entirety of the age of the church from John's time until the second coming of Christ. With the successive events unfolding with the successive chapters, you're moving forward from John's time through church history over a period of 2,000 years to the end when Jesus will come back. So this is what the Historicist view held.

Unlike the Preterist view that thinks the book is mainly about past events or the Futurist view that thinks the book is about future events, the Historicist view kind of stretches it out over the entire age of the church. And it was among the Historicists that this concept first arose, and that was that not only does the book of Revelation as a whole give you a panorama of the whole age of the church, but the seven letters in chapters two and three as a separate unit also give a panorama of the whole age of the church. This view plays well for Dispensational Futurists as well for reasons that we'll see when we get to chapter four, but we'll wait on that.

What this concept is is that these seven letters actually describe the church as a whole at seven different seasons of the age of the church. That is, the Ephesian letter describes the church in the Apostolic Age, roughly until the death of the last apostle around the end of the first century. So that from John's time, whenever he may have been writing, till about 100 AD, of course many people think he was writing in 96 AD so it's not very long, but the Apostolic Period, the church in the Apostolic Age from Pentecost really till the end of the first century, that that church is compared to the church of Ephesus.

A good church in general, but it's waning in its first love. The original revival at Pentecost was a revival of a kingdom of love, but of course as institutions began to set in near the end of the first century, much of which was testified to in the writings of Ignatius and also of the Didache, they got to be more structured and legalistic and not so much characterized just by love. That's the argument.

Then the church of Smyrna, which is described as suffering, persecution, they say, represents the church from about 100 AD to about 313 AD. Of course, 313 is the conversion of Constantine and with the conversion of Constantine, official Roman persecution of the church ended. And they say that from about the first century, about 100 or actually just before that, from the reign of Domitian, severe imperial persecutions characterized the church up until Constantine's conversion basically and his edict of toleration in about 313.

So for almost two centuries, or a little over two centuries really, the church was a suffering church and the church of Smyrna then is likened to the suffering church in the second two centuries. So you've got the church of Ephesus as a church in apostolic times in the first

century. The church of Smyrna, the suffering church, represents the church during the imperial persecutions until about the beginning of the fourth century, until 313.

Then the church of Pergamos represents the church after Constantine's conversion, but prior to the rise of the papacy. So that from about 313 until some would say 500, some would say 600 AD, with the rise of the papacy, that was a gradual thing. It's hard to really nail down when the papacy really begins, the pope system, but I think most historians would say around 600 with Pope Gregory the Great is the beginning of the papacy as an institution as we have come to know it and as it was known in the medieval church.

So from about 313 until about 600, another three centuries, we have the church of Pergamos. Now Pergamos is a church of the papacy, but said to be a compromised church. We don't see compromise with the world in Smyrna, but we see compromise with the world, some idolatry, some immorality being tolerated, some heresy being tolerated in the church.

And therefore as the church from Constantine on is said to have had more and more wedding of itself to the world in its ways, we see the church in compromise and that's the church of Pergamos. The church of Thyatira then is said to be the papal church from the rise of the papacy to about the Reformation really. So from about 600 to about 1500, we have the church under the popes, the medieval church, the Roman Catholic church of course, when it was the only game in town in the Western Europe.

That's the church of Thyatira. As the story goes, Sardis then is the Reformation church. The Reformation church, there's not much said about the church of Sardis except that it had a remnant of faithful people in it, but the church as a whole had a name that it was alive but it was not really alive, it was really dead.

By the way, Reformed people don't necessarily appreciate this characterization, but basically the churches of the Reformation had some signs of life, enough to look like something was really happening, but they were really not spiritually alive according to this view. That's Sardis. Then we have Philadelphia and Laodicea and on some views these kind of overlap each other.

Philadelphia, beginning in maybe about 1700 to the present time is the missionary church, the church of the open door so to speak. There are actually some churches that name themselves that, the church of the open door. Probably they are dispensational churches that are influenced by this idea.

Jesus says to this church, I have set before you an open door. This is understood to be an open door of evangelism and outreach and missions. From 1700 approximately on, we see the church focusing more on the missionary effort up to this day.

The church of Philadelphia is said to come up to our own time, but Laodicea is also thought to be kind of overlapping in our own time. Laodicea, as you may have heard, is thought to be, well, it's the lukewarm church. It's the church that Christ complained is their lukewarm and they

don't know it.

They're poor and blind and naked and they don't know it. It's a church that's become complacent and comfortable and so forth, but it thinks it's rich and healthy and all that. Therefore, this church, Laodicea, is usually, at least by dispensationalists and evangelicals of a conservative sort, equated with the liberal churches or they might say the apostate churches.

They would point out, no doubt, that almost every denomination that was once evangelical now has a liberal wing. You still have evangelical Lutherans, but you have liberal Lutherans. You have evangelical Presbyterians, but you have liberal Presbyterians.

You have evangelical, more or less, Episcopalians, and you have liberal ones, too. The Methodist church has its conservative wing and its liberal wing. Baptists, some Baptist denominations are liberal, some are conservative.

Even Mennonites now have their liberal wings in contrast to the conservative. Almost every church that exists as an evangelical church also has a branch that's gone off into liberalism where they deny the essential inspiration of Scripture, the miracles, even the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ is sometimes called in question. They would say that's the apostate church, that's the church of Laodicea.

They see Philadelphia and Laodicea side by side in the end times. When you get to the end of chapter three, they say you're at the end of the church age. The historicist view would say when you get to the end of the church age at the end of chapter three, you just kind of start at the beginning of the church age and go through it again through the rest of the book of Revelation.

The dispensationist would say you get to the end of the church age, you've got the rapture. Therefore, chapter four, verse one is thought to be the rapture of the church in the futurist view. Everything after chapter four, verse one is thought to be a future tribulation that will not occur until the church is gone.

So this is a way of looking at things that I personally was taught. If you know anything about church history and you know anything about these letters, you realize it's kind of interesting. There are some interesting parallels.

If you actually read the commentators who believe this, they bring out much more detail than I just did in this overview. They bring out specifics that seem to them to correspond with the church at those ages. Now, it's tempting to believe this, but I'm going to have to discourage belief in it.

I mean, you can believe it if you want to, but I'm not going to try to encourage that. I, first of all, would say there's absolutely nothing in the book of Revelation to indicate that these churches represent anything other than what they were, seven churches at that time. Now, of course, the number seven might mean the whole church and someone might extrapolate the whole church age.

Well, I could see maybe someone doing that, but we're never told that these letters represent different successive eras of the church history at all. This is simply something that someone has put together by recognizing similarities here. And maybe somebody was inspired and they got this notion, but John didn't say it.

John didn't let us know. The Holy Spirit didn't tell us. And therefore, I'm not going to say that I believe it because I don't think I do.

One of the problems with it is it suggests that the whole church worldwide was a certain way during a period of time. Then the whole church worldwide was a different way at another period of time. Then at another time, the whole church worldwide.

And you realize that when we think of church history, when we in the West study church history, we're mainly thinking of Western church history. I mean, the papal church, if that's what Thyatira represents, is only the Western church. The Eastern Orthodox Church was not papal.

I mean, it was for a while, but they split. The Church of the East in Syria and Babylon and further east into India and China, that was a very thriving church. It never had any dealings with the Pope at all.

The Coptic Church in Egypt and Africa was not papal. So, in other words, to suggest that Jesus is only interested in the Western church strikes me as rather provincial. And of course, it's Western theologians that have come up with this scheme.

The Reformation, likewise, which they equate with Sardis, that only happened in the West. There was no Reformation in the Eastern Orthodox Church or the Church of the East or the Coptic Church. That's just Western church history.

It's acting like we in the West are the only Christians there ever really were, or at least the only ones Jesus is paying attention to. And we think we're significant. I mean, what could be more significant than us? But, in fact, the Western church does represent the minority of Christians in the world at any given time.

And we study Western church history partly because almost all of us are products of the Reformation, which was a product of Roman Catholicism, which was a product of developments in the Western church. So, in other words, it strikes me as this scheme is very provincial. It's very Western, confined to Western church interests.

The Eastern church is, you know, this view acts like there is no church except the Church of the West. Like, what was Jesus thought about the Coptic Christians or the Eastern Christians during this time? Well, he didn't care about them. He's just looking at the West like we do.

He's like us, in other words, obsessed with our own area and our own fortunes. But that isn't necessarily something that strikes me as likely. Furthermore, it is certainly artificial to suggest

that the whole church at any time was a certain way, when, in fact, for example, in John's day there were seven churches, each of them one of these ways.

In other words, the church is not a monolithic thing worldwide where all the Christians at one time were being persecuted, all the Christians at one time are lukewarm, all the Christians at one time have left their first love. I mean, all these seven churches existed simultaneously and had these traits that are here. So, as appealing as this view of the letters is, I don't know that I could, I don't think it could be correct.

Well, it could be correct, but I don't think it is. I don't know. I mean, so I'm not going to take that approach, although it is an approach I was taught and which actually is embraced by two of the four views of Revelation.

The Preterists don't believe this and the Idealists don't, but the Historicists and some Dispensationalists do. So, you can just realize about half, half of the views, of the four views have suggested this approach to these letters. Now, one thing that everyone can agree about is that these letters do have some things in common.

They're very symmetrical in their design. Not perfectly so, but amazingly so. They all have, with some notable exceptions, but in general the pattern is there are eight features of each letter.

The first feature is the line, To the angel of the church of, and then a city is named. The church in that city is being addressed, but not just the church, but the angel of that church is being addressed. Why it would be that the angel would be addressed instead of the church itself is not known, except many people believe that the word angel, angelos, should mean messenger, and therefore it's somebody who might have been a reader in the church.

Someone who officially read documents and epistles and so forth that were sent to the church, who read them out loud to the church, so that might be what the angel of the church is, the angelos, the messenger of the church. But, in any case, each letter is addressed to the angel or the messenger of the church of. That's how each letter begins.

The second thing in every letter is the line, These things says, and then Jesus identifies himself differently in each case. Many times he describes himself with terminology from chapter one, the vision that John saw. These things says the one who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like burnished bronze.

Or these things says the one who has a sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth. Or these things says the one who stands among the seven lampstands. In other words, Jesus, at least in the initial stages of addressing these churches, describes himself in language that is brought to our attention from the vision in the first chapter.

This ceases to be so much the case as you get to some of the later letters. He doesn't borrow as heavily from that language from the first chapter in some of the later letters, but it suggests that there are certain things about that vision of Jesus. Some aspects pertain more to what he

has to say to this church, and some things pertain more to what he has to say to another church.

He says the things about himself that are going to be pertinent to what he has to say about them, which is interesting because it means that Jesus, of course, is multifaceted, and some facet of Jesus may in fact provide the basis for his message to one particular church because they are in violation of that particular facet of his personality or his character. In a sense, he might reveal himself to different churches somewhat differently according to the needs of the church at different times. This doesn't mean that Jesus is amorphous and that he doesn't have any actual objective being and he can just be whatever you perceive him to be, but it does mean that Jesus is so multifaceted that some facet of him may be the thing that he needs to really impress upon a congregation at a certain point because of a deficiency in their life as a congregation, and that seems to be the case in these letters.

So he says to the angel of the church of, that's the first line in every letter. The second thing is these things says then some description of Jesus. It's always Jesus, but only once does he actually use his actual name in one of them.

Most of the time it's he who has such and such traits. The third thing in every letter is the statement after he's identified himself, he says, I know your works. Now sometimes this is encouraging and sometimes this is ominous depending on what kind of works have been going on in that church.

If the church is very badly compromised, I know your works is more or less makes them shiver, I'm sure. I'm watching you. I know what you're doing and it isn't a good thing.

But in a few cases, I know your works and all he has to say are good things. So the one thing that can be said about this line is whatever the church is doing, Jesus knows it. In some cases he is displeased with the church and has no good works to commend them for.

That's true in two churches, the church of and no criticism. That's true of the church of Smyrna and the church of Philadelphia. Apart from these exceptions, he usually has something good and something bad.

I've got good news and I've got bad news for you. I know some of your works are good. But in the cases where, other than Smyrna and Philadelphia, where there was apparently nothing wrong with them that he wanted to bring up, he then follows the I know your works.

He first commends them and then the next thing he does is says, but I have something against you. And he doesn't leave them in suspense as to what it may be. He tells them.

So here we have the normal paradigm for the letter. He says, I know your works. That's the third element of each letter.

The fourth would be his commendation of whatever is good about them. And the fifth would be

his criticism of whatever it is is bad about them. But since there are four churches out of the seven that either that are lacking one of these things, there's really only three churches that have both things, a commendation and a criticism.

But Jesus always gives the commendation first, which is probably a good policy. If you're going to criticize someone and if there's anything you can say affirming first, you might grease the skids a little bit for your criticism to be more well received. Just they see you're not just being critical.

But a couple of churches, he couldn't think of anything good to say about it. And a couple of them, he couldn't think of anything bad to say about it. But if there was both something good and something bad, he commended them first and then he criticized what was wrong.

And then the sixth element would be a call to repentance. And this is present in five of the churches. Of course, the two that he had no criticism of were not called to repent.

I mean, why would he call them to repent when he hadn't told them anything they're doing wrong? So Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only churches that are not called upon to repent. The other five are told at this point in the letter to repent. Then there are two features that close every letter.

In the first three letters, they're in one order. In the other four letters, they're in the opposite order. The reason for this shift is a mystery.

There's absolutely nothing I can think of that would explain why the order is reversed, especially in view of the otherwise tremendous symmetry of the letters. Why gratuitously? The order of the last two items would be reversed in the last four letters. I have no idea.

I've never found a commentator who could say. Of approximately 50 that I've read, no one seems to have any answer to this. It's just the way it is.

And these two features are, in the first three letters, He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Followed by, To him who overcomes, and then there's a promise. But in the last four letters of the seven, it's the promise to the overcomers comes first.

And the letter ends with the exhortation, He that has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. So that's how the churches are laid out. I mean, the letters to the churches.

And we will only look at the first several tonight, because there's too much to say to hope to get through all of them. As Art found out, he couldn't really say all he wanted to say about all seven of them, so he had to abbreviate his talk. So also, I will not try to bite off more than I can chew in one lecture.

Let's look at the first of these letters. It's the Church of Ephesus. The region where Ephesus was

a city at one time is called Ayyaisalik, or something like that.

It's Turkish. I don't speak Turkish. But this city of Ephesus is no longer there.

It was a very important city, not only secularly, but also in the Bible, it's very important. It was not the political capital of that province, but it was the biggest city. It was the most important city of the province in many ways.

In the days of John, its population is thought to have been about a quarter of a million. And it was the most populous and the most important city, just like New York City would be in America. It's not the capital of the country, but it's in many respects the most important city economically, and it's got the biggest population of any city and so forth.

When people from other countries think of America, there's a good chance they think of New York, because America is New York to some people. When I was in Germany as a teenager, talking to Christians there, and the subject of Revelation came up, and we were talking about who do you think Babylon is in Revelation, it seems like most of the German evangelicals I talked to thought it was New York City. They didn't say America, they said New York City, which is interesting, because obviously if it is New York City, it probably would be America too.

But in any case, people think of New York City when they think of America. People thought of Ephesus probably first when they thought of the province of Asia, because that was a thriving metropolis and large and populated. But Christian-wise, it was a very important city too.

The Church of Ephesus was founded by the Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey, and he didn't stay there very long initially. He seems to have left his co-workers, Priscilla and Aquila, in charge of the church, because he was in a hurry to get back to Jerusalem to keep one of the Jewish festivals there, which he did not because he felt compelled by conscience, but because he wanted to, as much as possible, heal the wounds between the Jewish and the Gentile mission. The Jewish mission was very suspicious of Paul and his Gentile mission, and so he liked, as often as possible, to show his solidarity with the church in Jerusalem.

And so if he could, he liked to get back at the festivals and celebrate there with them. And he came to Ephesus on his way back to Jerusalem on his second missionary journey, and he did not stay there long. But he left, apparently, Priscilla and Aquila, his co-workers, there, and he moved on, went on to Jerusalem.

After he was gone, another powerful preacher named Apollos came to Ephesus, and he was a pretty good preacher, but he needed some correction in his theology, but Priscilla and Aquila took care of that and sent him on his way. Later, Paul came back and ministered in Ephesus for the better part of three years, apparently. And while he was in Ephesus, the Bible says in the book of Acts, all of Asia, all of Turkey, heard the word of God.

It would seem that many of the churches we're reading about here in this book were evangelized either by Paul or persons that he sent out while he was spending time in Ephesus.

Ephesus was the hub of his outreach to this subcontinent or whatever it would be, this province. Now, later, Timothy was a church leader in Ephesus, and apparently, later still, the apostle John was.

So this was a very privileged church. They had been founded by Paul himself. They had benefited from the ministries, the local residential ministries of Priscilla and Aquila.

They'd been visited by Apollos. Paul ministered there for many years. Timothy, Paul's protege after that.

And then the apostle John spent his final years there. And at the time that John wrote this, it is probable that Ephesus was his home church. And as he was banished to Patmos, he was probably homesick.

And we saw in chapter 1 that he said he was in the spirit on the Lord's Day. If he's referring there to Sunday, which at least later, the Christians called the Lord's Day and may have called it that in his day as well, then it may have been Sunday morning and he was probably missing his home church in Ephesus. And then the voice behind him says, Take a letter to Ephesus and these other churches.

And so the first letter is to Ephesus, his own home church. And the letter goes like this. To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars. And you have persevered and have patience and have labored for my namesake and have not become weary.

Nevertheless, I have this against you that you have left your first love. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, repent and do the first works or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent. But this you have, one final commendation for them, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

He that has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. So the way that Jesus introduces himself is from chapter one.

And the way he promises good things to the overcomers is from the final chapter of Revelation, chapter 22, which describes the tree of life being in the New Jerusalem. And so, in a sense, the letter itself calls to mind really the whole book of Revelation in some respects. And this is one of the churches that Jesus has good things to say about and some criticism as well.

He actually thinks of another good thing to say after he's made his criticism. So he tags that in as almost an appendix. Oh, yeah, you've got this other thing going for you that I like.

You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. I do too, he says. Well, now we're going to have to ask who the Nicolaitans are.

But first, let's get to the earlier material. Now, Jesus says he is the one who is walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. The threat he makes to them if they do not repent is that he will remove their lampstand from that place, which means they will no longer have him walking among them.

If the lampstand is removed, the light has gone out. The church exists no more. And Jesus no longer walks among them.

So this is a serious threat. He says, I know your works. And he says a number of things that are really quite good.

He says, I know your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. This church was somewhat intolerant of evil. Now, tolerance today is considered to be a virtue.

And therefore, if we found a group of Christians intolerant of evil, we might not consider that a virtue. Jesus, however, has not begun to criticize. He's still saying what can be said positively about the church here.

It was good that they could not tolerate evil. Now, this doesn't mean that they didn't love evil people. Well, maybe it does.

But they should have loved them. Remember, they've left their first love. So it may be that they are an unloving, intolerant church.

But even a church that has its first love should have the ability to discern between good and evil and to hold the standard high and say, we are going to stand for the good, and we're not going to tolerate sin and evil. Now, tolerate evil, we have to remember that if you're going to tolerate Christians, you're going to have to tolerate a certain amount of sin because Christians sin too. But Christians don't want to sin, and Christians repent when they sin.

Unfortunately, churches often are infiltrated by people who are not Christians, who live in sin and don't repent of sin, so that the church becomes corrupted and the standards of the church and its testimony is brought down. And it's good for the church to be intolerant of that. Paul, when he was writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5, said he was very critical of the Corinthian church because they tolerated a man who was living in incestuous fornication.

And he said, you people are proud of yourselves. You should be grieving because you have not kicked this man out. You've not exercised proper church discipline.

And Paul said, I've already judged him. He says, when you all come together, you need to turn that man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit might be saved in the day of Christ Jesus. This is a loving thing to seek his salvation in the end, but it's severe.

You kick him out. You don't tolerate evil. The Corinthian church had this as a weakness.

They did tolerate evil. And so did some of the churches. John's writing to here, Dictation from Christ.

This church was good about that. They were good about not tolerating sin and evil in the church. And he says, you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars.

There are false apostles. Now, in our day, there are churches that are founded by men who call themselves apostles or their followers call their leaders apostles. And in some cases, there's no reason whatsoever to accept their claim.

In fact, I have to say that in the 40 something years I've been a minister, I've met many people who either called themselves apostles or someone called them apostles. I've never found any of them yet to really be men that I would find any compelling reason to accept them as apostles. Maybe a few could almost qualify.

But if you criticize such men, many times they don't like being judged. They say, don't touch the Lord's anointed. How dare you criticize? How dare you raise questions about the Lord's anointed? Well, that's exactly what the church of Ephesus did.

And Jesus thought that was good. They tested the people who claimed to be apostles. Found out some of them were not the real deal.

Some of them were false apostles. And Jesus says, good, good. You checked them out.

Good, you found them to be liars. You tested them. This testing of the false apostles probably was an attitude the church had picked up from Paul.

Because in Acts chapter 20, essentially the final words that Paul had with the church of Ephesus or with their elders, was when he called them to Miletus to have a final conference as he was on his way to Jerusalem. And in Acts chapter 20, he was talking to the elders of the church of Ephesus, this same church. Although probably an earlier generation of leaders than the one that John is writing to.

Maybe not though. And Paul said in Acts 20, 29, For I know this, that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, also from among yourselves, that is among the eldership themselves, the leaders of the church, among them, men will rise up, speaking perverse things, and draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone, night and day, with tears.

So he's telling these leaders to watch out for false leaders, wolves, even men in the eldership who might get a little too ambitious and want to start a movement of their own and draw away disciples just after themselves. And the church apparently took Paul seriously, so that when

Jesus now sends a letter to them, probably maybe a decade or more later, it could be the same leaders that Paul addressed for that matter, he says, you've been doing the right thing. You've not been tolerating the false leaders that come through.

You've been exposing them, like Paul told them to do. Actually in the second century, the letters of Ignatius include a letter that Ignatius wrote to Ephesus. He wrote them around 115 AD.

So depending on when Revelation was written, this was anywhere between 20 and maybe 40 years after the writing of the book of Revelation. And Ignatius commended this church also for being intolerant of false teaching. This was a church that really held the standard high for orthodoxy, for genuineness of the ministry.

They didn't tolerate evil. They were a very uncompromising church in that respect. But as often happens, when churches are committed to judging, proper judgment, there's that tendency to become less charitable.

And they had left their first love. Jesus said that was their problem. I have this against you, you've left your first love.

Now, he said this is bad enough that you're going to have to repent of that or else I'm going to remove your church. I'm going to remove your lampstand. It's not okay.

Not okay to leave your first love, no matter how many other good things can be said about you. Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13? The first three verses, if I speak with the tongues of men or even the tongues of angels and don't have love, I'm just making a whole lot of noise. And he said if I understand all mysteries and have all knowledge, I mean I've got perfect doctrine, but I don't have love, I'm nothing.

Even if I give my body to be burned and give all my goods to feed the poor, if I don't have love, it profits me nothing, he said. In other words, no matter how many other good things can be said about a Christian or a church, if they don't have love, they're not okay. Jesus isn't going to keep them around.

It's important. You see, Jesus said, A new commandment I give to you that you love one another, as I have loved you. He said, By this all men will know that you're my disciples, if you have love one for another, in John 13, 34 and 35.

Love is the one thing that defines a church. Love is the one thing that defines a disciple. The other things are important in their own place, but none of them are important enough to outweigh the deficit in the area of loving.

And yet, it is in the very act of being careful and discerning and judging, as we are required to do, that we may lose sight of charity toward people. There is such a thing as having charitable judgment. You can judge people as charitably as the facts may allow.

You don't have to be harsh in your judgment. In fact, you shouldn't be. Paul said in Galatians 6, 1, Brethren, if any of you are overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual, restore such one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourselves, lest you also be tempted.

You don't come harshly at a person who has fallen and damage them more by the way that you criticize them. You seek to restore them in the spirit of meekness, in a loving way. You don't see the person as an embarrassment that you're trying to sweep under the rug or kick out.

You see that person as somebody who needs to be restored and that you hope you'll lay your life down for them, if necessary, to get them back into the fold. But a lot of times, a church becomes obsessed with what they might call sound doctrine. And when they do, then people who don't have what they call sound doctrine are considered to be maybe not even brethren.

Or if they are brethren, then they're brethren that are not someone they want to sidle up next to and fellowship with. And so they lose their first love. Okay, and then he says, But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, verse 6, which I also hate.

Now, who then are the Nicolaitans? And they are mentioned twice in the seven letters. They're mentioned also in the letter to the church of Pergamos, where it says in verse 15 of this same chapter, to a different church, to Pergamos, it says, Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Now, in both cases, when the Nicolaitans are mentioned, Jesus says, I hate that.

In the church of Ephesus, it was the deeds of the Nicolaitans. In the church of Pergamos, it was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. And obviously, what people do and what they believe define their religious distinctives.

And the Nicolaitans must have been hateful to Christ in every aspect of their religious life. And yet, they were in the church, or tried to be. They tried to get into the Ephesian church, but the church was too tight and too discerning, and they threw them out.

Church of Pergamos, a little more loosey-goosey. They let them stay in there. And Jesus said, this is a problem.

You've got people in your church who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. And where the doctrine is, the deeds can't be far behind, because people will live out their beliefs. And so, Jesus said, I hate them.

Not the Nicolaitans. I hate their deeds. I hate their doctrines.

So, who are the Nicolaitans? Well, in certain circles, you'll hear a standard explanation of who the Nicolaitans were. And those who give it, give it because they heard someone else give it. And the person they heard, heard it from someone else.

Where the idea originated that's being passed along from person to person, generation to

generation, I do not know. I don't know where the original mistake was made. But it has become orthodoxy in certain circles, say the Nicolaitans.

What that means is this. It comes from two words, Nikos and Laos. Nikos means conquest.

And Laos means the people. These are Greek words. And they say, therefore, Nicolaitans are people who are somehow, their name comes from their conquest of the people.

Now, from this, they extrapolate. In the church, this could be. In fact, they stop saying could be and say it was those who divided the church into clergy and laity.

The clergy becoming dominant in the church and the laity being the common people. Obviously, the people who make this point, they're probably Plymouth Brethren, really. I hear it mainly among dispensationalists.

And Plymouth Brethren don't believe in clergy. And I'm not saying I do. But I'm just saying I wouldn't be surprised if this explanation originated among people who don't believe in the clergy, which would have to be either Plymouth Brethren or some other small group that's sort of anti-institutional.

I'm pretty anti-institutional, as everybody knows. But not so much that I want to make up doctrines to support things. There's no evidence, apparently, from the early church that the Nicolaitans were people who divided the church into clergy and laity.

It's a theory that someone came up with. And since very few people knew any other theory, they thought, well, let's go with that. However, the early church did talk about the Nicolaitans, the early church fathers.

In the 2nd century. Now, their view is very interesting, if you haven't heard it. Much more interesting than the other one, it seems to me.

Their view was the Nicolaitans was a movement named after a man named Nicholas. More or less Gnostic in their teachings. And especially that branch of Gnosticism that was antinomian.

You know what that word means? Antinomian means against law. Anti... Namos. Namos is the Greek word for law.

So antinomian means against law. And there were different kinds of Gnostics, but principally Gnostics were of the view that it doesn't really matter how you live, so long as what you know is intact. That's what Gnostics mean, people who know.

If you knew the mysteries that the Gnostics taught, you could pretty much ignore morals. Because you were saved by your knowledge, by your superior knowledge, not by how you behaved. And so many Gnostics were antinomians.

And many of them were in the church. According to some of the church fathers, there was

apparently a Gnostic or a proto-Gnostic antinomian movement that followed a man named Nicholas. And they were called the Nicolaitans, named after him.

What I find most interesting is who they say this Nicholas was. They say it was a man mentioned in the book of Acts, in chapter 6. In Acts chapter 6, there were seven men chosen to help distribute the relief to the poor in the church. And their names are given in verse 5, Acts 6, 5. It says, they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, also Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch.

This Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch, was originally chosen because he met the qualifications, which we read in verse 3. The apostle said, Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. So they did, and Nicholas was chosen. Out of a congregation that had well over 5,000 men, he was in the short list of trusted men who were regarded to have the Holy Spirit and wisdom and reliable guide.

But according to church fathers, he eventually was led astray into a Gnostic sort of a heresy, and people followed him, and they were called the Nicolaitans. Now, we don't have the Bible telling us whether this is true or not. It's kind of an awful thing to think about a man who might otherwise be a good brother and never did anything wrong and bad rumors spread about him.

But we don't have any alternative view about the Nicolaitans from the church fathers, and more than one of them confirmed this story. So the Nicolaitans, named very possibly after this man Nicholas, who had veered off from the Orthodox mainstream apostolic church and started his own maybe heresy or cult, they were in the church too in some cases, and they were probably teaching an antinomian heresy, which we do read many of these churches had problems with antinomianism. In fact, the church of Pergamos, which also has Nicolaitans in it, has got some problems with morality going on.

We'll talk about that when we get to it. In any case, the deeds of the Nicolaitans are among the things that Jesus said he hates, and the church of Ephesus commendably doesn't tolerate them. They hate them too.

Trouble is, they hate them without loving them. They've left their first love. You know, you can love people and still hate what is destroying them.

You can hate the deeds that someone is doing because you know it's destroying them. The reason you hate the deeds is because you love the people. That's why you hate a cancer in your child, because you love your child.

If you couldn't care less about your child, you couldn't care less about the cancer. What is destroying your child, you will hate because you love the child. What deeds are going on in a brother's life that are destroying him spiritually is something you'll have to hate.

You'll have to hate it if you love your brother. And so, it's good to hate the deeds that are

destroying the church or destroying your brothers, but you've got to not stop loving them. And that's what this church had failed in.

And so Jesus calls them to repent or else have their lampstand removed. This is, you notice he says in verse 5, or else I will come to you quickly. I mean, taken out of this context, in the book of Revelation, wouldn't I will come to you quickly, sound to you like he's talking about the second coming of Christ? Behold, I come quickly, it says in Revelation 22.

Well, there's several churches that Jesus says to them he will come to them quickly. In this case, he's talking about coming to them quickly and removing their lampstand. This has happened.

Their lampstand isn't in Ephesus anymore. So it would appear some temporal judgment has come upon them. Art was just telling me before class that most of the church was wiped out by malaria back, I think, in the early 4th century.

And there's a church kind of nearby on higher ground. There was, I guess, a mudslide covered up the old site. But old Ephesus isn't there anymore except as ruins.

You can go see them. They're ruins. But it would appear that the church in that original site isn't there unless they've just moved up to higher ground.

In any case, his coming to them and removing their lampstand does not appear to be a reference to the second coming of Christ at the end of the world. And he also tells other churches he'll come to them. Notice the church of Pergamos in verse 16 of the same chapter says repent or else I will come to you quickly.

The same words. But this time he says I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Now it's interesting because he had introduced himself to that church as the one who has the sharp two-edged sword out of his mouth.

So he had introduced himself in words that became sort of informed the threat he made to them just like he did with Ephesus. He's the one who walks among the lampstands. If they don't repent, he'll come to them and remove their lampstand.

So he's the one with the sharp sword out of his mouth in Pergamos. If they don't repent, he's going to come fight with them with the sword out of his mouth. If you look further over, the church of Thyatira is told in verse 25 hold fast what you have until I come.

They're not there today either. In chapter 3 and verse 3 he says to the church of Sardis at the end of there therefore if you do not watch I will come upon you as a thief. And in verse 11 speaking to the Philadelphia church he says behold I come quickly.

A lot of references to coming and also quickly. And coming to them, to the church. The lukewarm church in verse 20 is told behold I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into him. Now how many times Jesus

says he's going to come in one sense or another to the church. He's going to come fight against them, come remove them, come into their hearts, come whatever.

His coming in these cases is not referenced to the second coming. Certainly no one ever took Revelation 3.20 I will come into him and sup with him as a reference to the second coming. I think not.

Maybe they have. Not where I come from. But anyway, the churches are often told more often than not that Jesus is going to come to each of them and do something to them.

But most of those churches are just not there now. The church of Smyrna is still there. But these churches and in many cases the cities themselves are just ruins.

So it looks like he came and did what he said he was going to do which would underscore the fact that the coming of Jesus in Revelation isn't always referenced to the second coming. And we need to be careful about that because we assume in many cases the book of Revelation is about the end times and so when we hear him say I will come we're thinking well that's the second coming. In some cases in scripture it is.

But we have to take it case by case. In this case it certainly does not appear to be. I will come to you quickly and remove the lampstand.

Now he said that those who overcome he'll give to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise in the midst of the paradise of God. The tree of life no doubt just represents eternal life. Because you remember in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve after they sinned were deprived of access to the tree of life lest they should eat it and live forever.

Apparently eating it is that which allows persons to live forever. So to say I'll let you eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God is a way of saying I'll let you live forever. You'll have eternal life if you overcome.

Now that's important because overcoming in Revelation means being faithful until death. That's what overcoming means. He specifically says to the next church be faithful until death.

In chapter 2 and verse 10. But in Revelation chapter 12 and verse 11 the overcomers so to speak are mentioned. Revelation 12, 11 it says and they overcame him.

That is the church overcame Satan. They are overcomers. They overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony and they did not love their lives to the death.

They overcame him by staying faithful until they died. And even dying as martyrs apparently in some cases. Being an overcomer means that.

So if you overcome that means you stay faithful to Jesus till life, till death that is. He says I'll let you eat in the paradise of God on the other side I'll let you have eternal life. You'll eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God.

That means though you you may surrender your life in this world through your faithfulness to Christ well there's more where that came from on the other side. There's that tree of life over there. I'll let you eat from that he says if you're an overcomer here.

Now verse 8 we have the next letter. To the angel of the church of Smyrna write these things says the first and the last who was dead and came to life. I know your works, tribulation and poverty but you are rich.

And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not but are the synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested and you will have tribulation ten days.

Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. To he who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

Now notice overcoming is being faithful unto your first death. Be faithful unto death and I'll give you the crown of life. Again the crown of life is like the tree of life.

You'll be crowned with life, eternal life if you're faithful unto death. If you surrender your life in this world you'll find it to life everlasting as Jesus said. Remember Jesus said that in Matthew 16 he says he that seeks to save his life will lose it but he that loses his life for my sake will find it.

Meaning you'll find eternal life. You have to be prepared to give up your life in this world though if you want to qualify. And so to be faithful unto death you'll get a crown of life.

And whoever overcomes that is whoever is faithful to death will not at least be subject to the second death. At least you won't have to die again like some will. Many people as we shall see in Revelation 20 will be cast into the lake of fire and it says in Revelation 20 verse 15 this is the second death.

Or verse 14 I think it is. So you won't be cast into the lake of fire. You won't have the second death if you at least undergo the first death out of faithfulness to me.

Now notice when Jesus introduces himself to them he says I'm the first and the last who was dead and came to life. He's reminding them I died I'm going to be asking you to die. I'm going to ask you at least to be willing to die.

Be faithful unto death. I was and look it I'm alive. So I can make good on this promise.

If you die for me I can raise you. I can give you a crown of life. I can keep you alive beyond the time when others are experiencing the second death.

And I'm credible because I was dead and I'm alive now. That's what he says. So the way he introduces himself is clearly related to the message he has for them.

Smyrna by the way receives the shortest letter. And one of the reasons it's a short letter is

there's no criticism of Smyrna. They are suffering for Christ.

They are the suffering church. His message is I see you're suffering at the hands of people who are saying they are Jews. But in fact they're not.

Not as far as Jesus is concerned. Now by the way these would be people who are ethnic Jews of course. There's not people running around saying they're Jews who are not ethnic Jews.

What he's saying is really the same thing that John records Jesus saying elsewhere. Now this is John recording Jesus here. John wrote it.

Jesus is speaking. John wrote John chapter 8. And Jesus is speaking there also. In John 8, 44 Jesus said to certain Jews you are of your father the devil.

Earlier they said we're of our we're the children of Abraham. He said if you're the children of Abraham you do the deeds of Abraham but you're of your father the devil. You're doing what he wants.

So for Jesus here to say these people are really a synagogue of Satan. Just like the church is the synagogue or the temple or the tabernacle of God. So these anti-Christian Jewish people apparently and not all Jews are anti-Christian but there were some in Smyrna that were.

These people are a synagogue of Satan. They're persecuting the church. They're blasphemers against God.

And against the gospel that these people were probably preaching to them. By the way, Smyrna had the largest Jewish population of any of the other cities of Asia. And later on when Polycarp in the early 2nd century who was a bishop of Smyrna it's very tempting to think Polycarp might have been the messenger the angel to the church of Smyrna at this time but not likely.

He would have been too young when the book of Revelation was written if he was even born yet. So he's not the guy probably. But Polycarp is very famous for his martyrdom in Smyrna.

He was the bishop of Smyrna and he was arrested for his faith and he was burned at the stake. Initially the fires wouldn't burn him. There's a whole document from the early church called the Martyrdom of Polycarp and the church of Smyrna preserved it.

They wrote about his martyrdom. The details and they said that the fire was put by a stake and the fire was lit and the fires came up around him but they wouldn't touch him for apparently a long time. He just stood there singing.

He was a very old man. In his 90s probably at the time. And so a soldier stabbed him and his blood poured out and extinguished some of the flames at least but he died of bleeding.

The interesting thing is in the account of the Martyrdom of Polycarp which was saved by the

2nd century Smyrna church. They indicated that the Jews of that town played a very active role in encouraging the Romans to kill Polycarp and in helping to gather the wood. It actually says the Jews of the town went and they gathered wood to bring to they were so eager to burn him.

Apparently even a generation later than the book of Revelation the Jews of that particular town were very hostile toward the Christians. Although they didn't have the power like Rome did to actually make martyrs Christians they could participate enthusiastically and they did apparently. This reference to those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan has an echo in a letter to the church of Philadelphia in chapter 3 in verse 9. Apparently the Jews of that city were causing trouble to the church as well.

Chapter 3 verse 9 Jesus says indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not but indeed they're lying I will make them come and worship before your feet and to know that I have loved you. Apparently the Jews of that town were saying that the church is not loved by God. He says well they'll change their tune someday.

I'm going to make that happen. But you see both places these are the two churches that receive no criticism. Smyrna and Philadelphia.

They're the only two churches that don't receive criticism and they both happen to be suffering some kind of persecution of sorts from the Jewish element in their town. Now the other five churches we don't read there was any conflict with the Jews in their town. They had problems with the Romans or someone else or with heretics.

But Christians have suffered at the hands of various hostile parties and in those cases apparently Jewish parties. And so he tells them they're going to suffer but they should not be afraid of that. He said the devil's going to throw some of you into prison and you'll be tested.

That's what trials are for. They're to test you. Jesus knew it was going to happen.

He didn't promise to protect them from it. He just said I'm going to subject you to some testing here. The devil's going to do it.

He's going to throw you in prison. But it's not the devil who's interested in testing you. It's God who's interested in testing you.

God tests us by allowing us to be tempted and persecuted at times. Jesus of course could have said but don't worry I'll stop him. I'll deliver you.

I'll protect you. None of that was promised. Jesus could do that but he said no you're going to be tested.

That's a good thing. You need to be tested and if you pass the test you'll be glad. You'll be an overcomer.

He said you're going to experience tribulation for 10 days. Now nobody I know believes that's a

literal 10 day period. Some preachers thought this is a reference to 10 emperors that persecuted the church traditionally.

Others feel that 10 days just means a short time but a time that if you're in prison it's an uncomfortable time. To be 10 days in prison is not maybe going to ruin your whole life but it's certainly going to ruin your whole day. It's going to ruin your whole week.

It's going to be unpleasant but short lived this persecution that's coming through town. What I find fascinating here is the promise he makes where he said be faithful until death and I'll give you the crown of life. Now this promise I will give you the crown of life seems to be echoed in James as if James had read Revelation.

Now the reason that's intriguing to me is that if James read Revelation Revelation must have been written very early because most scholars place James pretty early. Some of them think it was the earliest book of the New Testament to be written. If as I'm suggesting it may be that James was familiar with the book of Revelation then of course James was not the earliest book but still no doubt early enough to mean that Revelation had to be earlier still and in James chapter 1 and verse 12 where Christians are encouraged to endure trials like the church of Smyrna was encouraged to do.

James said blessed is the man who endures temptation or trial the word temptation and trial are the same word in the Greek for when he has been proved remember Jesus said you'll be tested proved same word this almost sounds like a line out of Jesus letter to the church of Smyrna blessed is the man who endures testing or trial for when he has been tested or proved he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him the Lord being Jesus when did Jesus ever promise a crown of life to anybody not in the gospels certainly we don't have any record of Jesus making a promise like that anywhere in the gospels where do you find a promise from Jesus to give the crown of life to anybody there's only one other reference in the whole bible besides this place in James to a crown of life and that is in the promise Jesus made to the church of Smyrna be faithful unto death Revelation 2.10 and I will give you the crown of life James seems to be familiar with that promise he's talked about you'll receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised if they had read Revelation at this time then they'd know exactly what promise James is referring to and we would also know how James came to think that the Lord had made such a promise he would have read it in Revelation if Revelation wasn't written before James though of course then James just coincidentally talks about a situation very parallel to what is in Jesus letter to the church of Smyrna and you know comes up with the same phrase as Jesus did just by coincidence I'm thinking the likelihood is greater that James has read the book of Revelation making Revelation a rather early book earlier than the traditional popular date today now let's look at the compromising church here verse 12 the church of Pergamos now the city of Pergamos was the provincial capital that is the political capital of the province of Asia so as we said Ephesus was like the New York City of Asia Pergamos would be like the Washington D.C. of Asia the political quarters of power for the province were in this town and this town had a lot of Roman pagan influence that could really

put the church under a lot of pressure there the Roman sword of course associated with the Roman government remember Paul said about the rulers they don't bear the sword in vain the Roman sword so to speak was centered in this province in this town maybe that's why Jesus describes himself as the one who has a sharp two edged sword maybe it's why he says if you don't shape up I will fight with you with the sword that comes out of my mouth are you afraid of the Roman sword you haven't seen nothing yet and in Pergamos there was a lot of different kinds of satanic influence and Jesus actually refers to Pergamos as where Satan's throne is now there's several things that were in Pergamos that could be referred to as Satan's throne or maybe none of them are and Satan's throne is simply a term used in addition to any of these things the city was the first city to build a temple to Caesar Augustus and therefore although Caesar worship was not mandatory or instituted throughout the Roman Empire at any time yet this town voluntarily worshipped the Caesar they built a temple to Caesar Augustus they also built a temple to Zeus there and a temple to Asclepius Asclepius was a serpent god according to the mythology Asclepius was a god who had received a healing fruit from a serpent and the imagery of two serpents adorns the temple of Asclepius and you know Art was actually mentioning this earlier that the symbol for the American Medical Association is a pole with two serpents on it some people maybe mistakenly think that that's an allusion back to Moses raising up a serpent on the pole because you think well they were healed a snake bite but there's two serpents on it and it's actually based on the myth of Asclepius the god of healing the serpent god you know the Hippocratic oath which doctors used to always have to say as they entered medical practice or completed their education the Hippocratic oath is sort of the accepted oath for all medical people to say have you ever read it the opening lines are I swear by Asclepius and all the gods and goddesses that and it goes on imagine western doctors in a Christian country saying this oath I swear by Asclepius and all the gods and goddesses Asclepius was the god of healing the temple of Asclepius was visited by people who were sick from all over the world it was like the lords of the ancient world people apparently were healed there if so probably by demonic power now whether it was the worship of the emperor or the worship of Zeus or the worship of this occultic power of healing one of those or all of them combined Jesus refers to as the throne of Satan this is Satan's throne here and so we read to the angel of the church of Pergamos write these things says he who has the sharp two edged sword I know your works and where you dwell where Satan's throne is you're up against something I know it this is not an easy place to be a Christian there's a lot of spiritual warfare going on in this place and yet you hold fast to my name and did not deny my faith even in the days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr who was killed among you where Satan dwells this is the only church we know of that has already had a martyr the martyr's name was Antipas but we know nothing else about him Fox's book of martyrs I think has some kind of information about his martyrdom but I don't think it's taken from early sources we don't really have authoritative information about who this Antipas was but we know this he was a martyr he died and this was in the Roman capital so it was very probable he died under Roman authority as opposed to you know just tripping and falling and being run over by a chariot or something you know by accident he probably was killed by the Romans and this was something that the church was commended that they didn't you know draw back from their confession when they

watched this guy go he may have been the church leader at the time he is referred to as my faithful martyr in the Greek that's the same expression that you find of Jesus in Revelation 1.5 where he's called the faithful witness the word witness and martyr are the same Greek word so actually the expression is the same Jesus is called the faithful witness Antipas is called the faithful witness too that in a sense is the dignity afforded to a faithful martyr that he wears the same title in a sense that his Lord does and he says this church though they lost a martyr no doubt a very demoralizing experience for a church did not give up they did not back down they didn't deny him even under that kind of pressure but I have a few things against you because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel and to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality thus also you have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans which things I hate repent or else I will come to you quickly and I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches to him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat and I will give him a white stone and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it now as quickly as possible the problems in this church were they had those who were teaching the doctrine of Balaam and of course they had the doctrine of the Nicolaitans now what is the doctrine of Balaam said to be well it's what Balaam taught Balak who's Balak well Balak was the Moabite king who wanted to curse Israel when they were passing through his territory and he hired Balaam to curse them and Balaam couldn't do it he tried he wanted to make the money but God always overpowered Balaam and he was not able to do it he'd go into a trance and instead he'd prophesy a good thing about Israel and this made his employer very upset and Balak was furious and said I'm paying you to say the opposite not this and Balaam found himself totally incapable of earning his fee and so he came up with another plan and that is I'll tell you what I can't curse these people but you can get their god to curse them you send your pretty girls down there from Moab and from Midian and seduce the men of Israel into sexual immorality and to worship Baal Peor your god and their own god will curse them and of course that didn't happen and as the men of Israel compromised in the area of sexual immorality and idolatry through what Balaam had counseled a plague came on Israel and almost wiped them all out until Phineas a priest threw a javelin through a couple who were having sex killed them and that ended the plague pretty gruesome story as a matter of fact a lot of people died but Balaam was responsible for that this is actually mentioned in Numbers chapter 31 and verse 16 on the occasion of Balaam's death it records that he had instigated this thing and so Jesus refers to it Balaam counseled Balak to put a stumbling block in front of the children of Israel to get them to commit fornication and to sacrifice to idols or to eat things sacrificed to idols therefore the teaching of the antinomians which encouraged immorality and idolatry was very parallel to that and so it's called the doctrine of Balaam and apparently it was not too different than the doctrine of the Nicolaitans which things Jesus hates now what he promises the overcomers here are two things I will give some of the hidden manna to eat now what they have to overcome is the temptation to follow this doctrine of Balaam it's much easier when you live in a pagan Roman stronghold like Pergamos to just kind of go along and especially when everyone expects you to participate in the idolatrous feast that was as normal for citizens to do as for

kids to say the pledge of allegiance at school it was basically your way of being a good citizen you go offer a sacrifice to Caesar Augustus or to the gods of Rome if you didn't placate the gods of Rome you're causing the gods of Rome to get angry and maybe they'll send an earthquake or a volcano or something to wipe people out you are you're like a traitor to your country you're endangering your nation if you don't worship the gods of Rome and especially in a place like Pergamos which was the Roman capital of the region they were under great pressure to participate at least in the idol feast no wonder there were people in church saying it's okay to do that we don't have to have this tension between us and our environment we can just go along and there would be great pressure but the overcomers are those who aren't going along they're actually facing the prospect of death like Antipas did because they won't eat meat sacrificed to idols and Jesus says well don't worry I'll give you something better to eat you stay away from those idol feasts and I'll give you a feast of your own I'll give you the hidden manna this is a reference no doubt to the manna that was in the golden pot that was stored in the Ark of the Covenant and it was a Jewish tradition that Jeremiah the prophet had taken the Ark of the Covenant down to Egypt before the Babylonians came and destroyed the temple that is Nebuchadnezzar and his armies never took away the Ark of the Covenant because Jeremiah according to tradition had whisked it off and spirited it off to Egypt where he escaped that destruction and some rabbis taught it's kind of a strange tradition but they had many strange traditions the rabbis did they taught that when the messianic age arrives that Jeremiah will come back and he'll pull out the pot of manna out of the Ark of the Covenant and he'll miraculously feed the multitudes with it this is probably why when Jesus fed the multitudes people said this is surely that prophet that was to come and they got all excited they were thinking of that tradition probably well the hidden manna is the if Jeremiah showed up and opened the pot of manna and fed people it was the beginning of the messianic age Jesus says I'll give you the hidden manna to eat you'll be part of this age of the Messiah and of course the manna is Jesus as he pointed out in John chapter 6 I am the bread that came down from heaven and so he's saying basically I'm going to give you myself really and you'll be part of the messianic age messianic feast you don't join the feasts of the pagan idols and you'll be part of my feast he says now give him a white stone on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it the white stone there's three very good opinions about what this means in fact my next book will be the white stone three views no I can't write a whole book length on this but the white stone there are three opinions I've encountered about this one is that it's a reference to a custom in the courts that a man when he was on trial and his case had been heard and the judge is handing down a verdict hands down either a white stone if it's acquittal or a black stone if it's condemnation the stone he receives either white or black determines his fate but a white stone to me he's acquitted and for Jesus to say I'll give you a white stone would be a way of saying I'm justifying you I'm acquitting you I'm going to judge you innocent and treat you as somebody who deserves to go free rather than punished like we are justified and so for Jesus to give a white stone to them would be basically saying you'll be justified you'll be acquitted you'll not be condemned if you overcome another view of the white stone is that a white stone was a token that was given to Olympic runners when they finished their race which they would later redeem for their actual wreath at the end of all the games

that when each person finished their individual race the winner would get a white stone it's like a token to hold on to and when all the races had been run and the games were over everyone would redeem their wreath, their award by turning in the white stone in exchange for it. I have no idea where these ideas come from. Commentators give them, they sound good I don't know if they make them up as they go along or if there really is documentation for these practices but it's great you finish your race you make it to the end of course you won't be rewarded until the races are run by all your brothers too but you get a white stone to hold on to until the day of judgment when you'll all be rewarded together the third view and the one that seems to be most common among commentators is that a white stone was sometimes given to a visitor to a town like a key to the city somebody important comes to town you give them a white stone and it serves as sort of a backstage pass to the theater and to the games and to the other thing, it's sort of like a key to the city, you get that you get access to everything in particular among the pagans it gives you access to the idolatrous feasts but if Jesus gives you a white stone it would be a pass to his feast and not to the idolatrous feast these are some of the thoughts associated with the white stone, which one is true if I knew that I could write a book but come to think of it I have but I didn't write one on that I don't know now quickly I know we've gotten late here but I want to take this last one now Thyatira is the least important of the churches in Asia, not much significance to this town I should say, the church I don't know but the town is not very significant yet it receives the longest letter of them all Smyrna, a very good church received the shortest letter Thyatira, a church that's got some serious problems in it receives the longest letter and Thyatira was the hometown of Lydia, that was Paul's first convert, the first Christian in Philippi Philippi of course was the first place Paul went in Europe, and so Lydia was the first European Christian but she was not from Philippi she lived there, she was there probably maybe had relocated on business, she was a seller of purple cloth, which was what her hometown Thyatira was famous for, but not for much else the town didn't have an awful lot as it claimed to fame, but it did produce purple cloth which was very expensive by the way purple, you know, we take for granted the cheap dyes and things we get, they had to make dye from plants and bugs and things like that and they had to squish bugs and get purple dye out of it or something and so it was quite arduous, quite labor intensive to make dyes and so a town that was famous for making purple was just, you know, that was enough, that's a lot of work and that's their claim to fame apart from that, Thyatira was not known for very much except it is known that there were quite a few trade guilds in the town one of the things, and that might have been significant because trade guilds means, you know, if you want to work at that town, you've got to be in the union there's a union shop here, you want to do your trade, you better join the guild problem is, these are pagan guilds and when they had their guild meetings, they all you know, they offered incense to idols and things like that, which all the pagans did, it was part of the meetings and so forth of the guild, so a Christian who couldn't do that, a person who wouldn't compromise like that would have trouble finding work because he couldn't be part of the guild so, you either were under pressure economically to compromise in this town, and maybe some Christians were in fact compromising, there was one woman in town, they called her Jezebel, or at least Jesus called her that I don't know if they called her that, Jesus called her Jezebel, and she was actually teaching the church, she was like a prophetess claiming

to be, and says, it's okay participate in the idolatry and fornication while you're at it and, because fornication was often part of the idolatrous temple worship too they had priestess prostitutes and, so that's what this town was like and it says, to the angel of the church of Thyatira write, these things says the son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass, eyes like a flame of fire, feet like brass, he sees clearly, penetrating vision he can judge righteously and his feet can trample irresistibly trampling the grapes of wrath as it were, when he judges his judgment is well informed and irresistible I know your works your love service, faith, and your patience and as for your works the last are more than the first so they're getting better in some ways nevertheless I have a few things against you because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile my servants, to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols now that's the same doctrine that was being taught in the church of Pergamos the difference is, apparently there were prophets or false teacher males teaching it in Pergamos, and in this town it happened to be a woman who was carrying that banner of antinomianism interestingly though the doctrines are both there commit fornication and eat sacrifice to idols, but in reverse order it may be that her emphasis was on the fornication whereas the teachers in Pergamos their emphasis was on the idolatry, but those two things often went together and there is emphasis in what Jesus says later on the sexual immorality of this woman and her followers he says I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality and she did not repent God's very gracious, he could just strike someone dead when they're offending him especially when they're corrupting the church but he gives them time, space I give her space to repent it says in 2 Peter 3 9 that God is not slack concerning his promise, but he's patient toward all, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance he gives time to repent of course the time he gives, sometimes these people can do more damage, so he can't give them forever, but he gave her space to repent, she didn't use the time well, she didn't repent, indeed I will cast her into a sick bed this may be literal, this woman might have actually gotten sick or it may be figurative as opposed to a bed of fornication she's going to go to a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation unless they repent of their deeds and I will kill her children which might be her literal children or it might be her disciples hard to say because it's hard to know how much of this is literal, how much is figurative her name probably wasn't literally Jezebel either probably a figurative name I'll kill her children with death and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts and I will give to each one of you according to your works, the churches need to learn this, God's going to judge us according to our works this is stated by Jesus in Matthew chapter 16 verse 27 he says the son of man will come in the glory of his father and his holy angels with him and he'll reward everyone according to his works or Paul in Romans 2 verses 6-8 says that he will reward each one according to his works and he gives examples, those who do evil, tribulation and wrath and so forth and those who do good will have eternal life in 1 Peter 1 17 1 Peter 1 17, Peter said if you call him father who without partiality judges every man according to his works pass the time of your sojourning here in fear he's writing to Christians you should live in the fear of God, why? because you call God your father and you know that he's going to judge everyone impartially by their works, including you apparently so judgment is by works in the book of Revelation chapter 20 we find

that the books are open to everyone who's judged by their works so what about our doctrine of justification by faith or by grace through faith not by works what do we do with that well we believe it we are justified by faith, we are justified by grace but we're judged by our works now is that a contradiction not at all if you are in fact born again which is the result of being justified by grace through faith, you will be born again you'll have a new heart, your works will be consistent with what you say you believe, remember James said faith without works is dead, if you say you have faith but you don't have the works, he says can that save you, he doesn't think so a faith that works through love is what Paul says saves us in Galatians 5, 6 it's faith that works through love, faith saves us but it has to be a faith that works, not a faith that doesn't work, it has to be a faith that changes you, if it doesn't change you, it doesn't change God's opinion of you if your faith doesn't matter to you, doesn't make a difference to you why should it make a difference to God when a person is converted genuinely, their faith changes who they are changes the direction of their going and their works show that they're a different person, their works aren't perfect no one's works are perfect but they're changed and God can take a look at our works and say okay, you have evidence that you have faith, you're in, you're saved by your faith but the way that your faith is registered is by the way you behave and that's Jesus apparently and Paul and Peter and every New Testament writer who talks about it seems to think that your works are a fairly fair gauge of whether you're saved or not so even though we're saved by something other than our works our works will show if we're saved or not because once you're saved it changes you, that's why it's called converted what does convert mean? in secular language convert means to change, that's what it means in scriptural language too it means you're changed, if you're not changed you're not converted if you're not born again you don't have a new life new behavior, then you're not what the Bible calls saved if you're justified by faith you'll be changed because that's the privileges that come with being a Christian you get changed by God, by His Spirit so I'm going to judge each one by his works and all the church is going to find that out he said in verse 23 but to you I say and to the rest in Thyatira as many as do not have this doctrine and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they call them I will put on you no other burden but hold fast what you have till I come and he who overcomes and keeps my works until the end to him I will give power over the nations he shall rule them with a rod of iron as a potter's vessel shall be broken to pieces, the quote is from Psalm 2 it's really a quote about Jesus but because you're an overcomer, you'll reign with him as Paul said, if we endure, we'll reign with him, you stay faithful to death and you'll sit with him on his throne Jesus says that later in chapter 3, he says to him that overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne even as I overcame and am seated with my father on his throne Revelation 3, 21 so you're going to reign with me, I'm going to reign over the nations, so will you if you're overcomers, I'll give you power over the nations along with me as I have also received from my father and I will give him the morning star which in chapter 22, verse 16 is said to be Jesus, Jesus is called the bright and morning star in Revelation 22, verse 16 so he gives the hidden manna to one group of overcomers, that's Jesus, he gives them himself, he gives the morning star to another group, that's Jesus too basically he says, you overcome what you get is me hope you like me because that's what you're going to get you know it says in Hebrews chapter 11 that he that comes to God must believe that he is and that he is the

rewarder of those who diligently seek heaven no, no it doesn't say that and he's the rewarder of those who diligently seek prosperity and health no he's the rewarder of those who diligently seek happiness no that's not in there either he's the rewarder of those who diligently seek him those who come to God must believe that he is and he's the rewarder of those who diligently seek him well if you're seeking him and you get rewarded, what do you get rewarded with? Him you'd be ripped off if you're seeking him and you got something else that's no reward, if I'm seeking him what I want is him and he says if you're an overcomer you'll get me you'll get the morning star, you'll get the hidden man, you'll get me in the deal, that's what this is all about this Christian life you get Jesus he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches I apologize some of these nights I do go quite late there's just not a good stopping point so we just keep going

OpenTheo

Revelation 3

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses Revelation 3 - a chapter in which Jesus sends letters to the seven churches of Asia. Gregg notes that two of these letters contain no negative feedback, but rather assess the churches as not being truly "alive." He stresses the importance of prioritizing the lordship of Jesus and the kingdom of God over earthly concerns like "bodies, bricks, [and] bucks." Gregg also analyzes perplexing statements in this chapter, such as the notion of having one's name "blotted out" of the book of life. Ultimately, he encourages listeners to persevere in their faith and seek special access to God through Jesus.

Transcript

Last time we took chapter 2, which contains four of the seven churches that received individual letters from Christ. It seems that the entire book of Revelation was written to the seven churches. That is what I gather from chapter 1, verse 10, where he says, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice as of a trumpet, verse 11, saying, I am Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last.

What you see, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches, which are in Asia, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. So, this book is sent to these seven churches, probably as what we call a circular epistle, one that would make the rounds. The geographical position of these cities in the order they're listed would encourage us to think of the letter first going to Ephesus, from Patmos, and then circulating in a rather horseshoe shape around to all the cities until it got to Laodicea.

And so, it was probably a circular epistle, but each one of the churches received a short letter tailored to their situation. Custom written by Christ for where they were at and what they needed to know. And so, in chapters 2 and 3, we have all seven of those short epistles.

Four of them were in chapter 2, and we have the remaining three in chapter 3, and that's where we come to this time. And to the angel of the church of Sardis, write, These things says he who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your works, that you have a name, that you are alive, but you're dead.

Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember, therefore, how you have received and heard. Hold fast and repent.

Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names, even in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the book of life.

But I will confess his name before my father and before his angels. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Now, Sardis was a city that had very ancient origins, way back in the 12th century BC, right after the fall of the Hittite Empire.

Now, the Hittites were in Canaan when Abraham went there, and they spread throughout much of the Middle East, the Hittites. They were a Canaanite people. When the Hittite Empire fell, shortly after that, Sardis rose as the capital city of an ancient, ancient empire called Lydia.

And Lydia remained an important empire in the ancient world, though we've probably never heard of it unless we've studied the book of Revelation and had to find out something about where Sardis was and what its history was. Lydia was very important in the time of the Persian Empire, and also in the time of Alexander the Great, and it existed under the Roman Empire. Actually, during the time of the Roman Empire in AD 17, the city was destroyed by an earthquake, but it was rebuilt.

And it remained important up into the Byzantine period, I believe up until about the 13th century. So, from about the 12th century BC to the 13th century AD, this city had importance, though it has been in ruins for centuries now. At least by the beginning of the 19th century, it was in ruins, and there is a, by it, by the ruins, there is a village called Sart, which is, obviously, has its name very similar to the ancient city's name.

It's just a village there now. This church is one about which Jesus does not have anything good to say. Now, he doesn't say as many negative things about it as he says about some of the other churches, but he doesn't have anything good to say about it.

It's typical in these letters for Jesus to say, I know your works, and then to say something good about them, something good about their works. But then, very typically, to say, but I have a few things against you, or I have this against you. That is, he knows their works, and he tells them what he thinks about their works, and usually there's something good to say, and then usually there's also something negative.

There's only two of the letters out of the seven about which Jesus has nothing negative to say. He has nothing negative to say to the Church of Smyrna, the second one, nor to the Church of Philadelphia, the sixth one. All the others he has something negative to say about.

But only two letters he has nothing good to say about, and that's Sardis and Laodicea. It's

interesting, some of the churches that he had both good and bad things to say about, the bad things were really bad. I mean, like having Jezebel teaching the people in the church to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols, or having the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which things Jesus hates.

Some of these churches that were actually, had some good things to say about them, had some really, really bad things to say about them. This church doesn't have much, there's not much really exceptionally bad about it. It just doesn't have anything to commend it.

What he says about it is, it has a name that it's alive, but it's dead. I suppose the only thing good about it is its name. It has a name that it's alive, it has a good reputation, but it's a dead church.

Now it's interesting that it would be viewed, probably in the eyes of men, as a church that had life, a living church. But by the assessment that Christ gives it, it's not alive. And I think this often can happen to a church, that it actually starts out, perhaps in a revival, actually starts out in a living way.

And it soon acquires a reputation for itself of being a wow, it's a really hopping church, it's really a live church. The churches around it envy it. The pastors invite it to speak at church growth conventions and so forth, because he's got a successful church.

But eventually, once they have that reputation, sometimes the original motivation for the good things they were doing cease to exist. It may be that they began with real purity, and their works were works of faith and works of love. But eventually, the works can sort of be done to just maintain the reputation that the church has.

Once the church knows that everyone looks at it as a living church, then it's under pressure to keep that reputation going. And sometimes the motivation to keep the reputation replaces the pure motives for doing good works before. And Jesus says, as a criticism of this church, I have not found your works perfect before God.

Again, this is kind of not really a slam. He didn't say your works are terrible. He said they're just not perfect.

But that's bad enough. Your works are not perfect because they're not coming from a living faith. The church is dead.

Now, how is it that a church that is dead might be mistaken for a living church? How could it have a name that it lives? I think because people look at the wrong things to decide whether a church is successful, whether a church is living. Sometimes if it's getting bigger, it's assumed, well, it must be living. Only living things grow.

This is a growing church. But it might not really be living. It might just be spreading.

It might just be getting fat and not growing up. It might not be real growth that shows for a

positive direction of life. It could actually be a degeneration.

After all, as people get older, sometimes they spread a little bit. And that's not an improvement. It's not an evidence that they're full of virility and full of life.

Usually it means they've been sitting on the couch too much. And a church can get that way too. It can look like it's getting bigger.

But by the standards that people measure the life of a church, it's improving. But by the standards that Christ measures a church by, it is not improving. It's dead.

A friend of mine who is a pastor in a denomination that I consider to be a relatively faithful denomination, an evangelical group whose forebears, the founder of the group, was a man full of the Holy Spirit. And he actually was a man with a healing ministry, although they were not a Pentecostal or charismatic group. He was just a man that God anointed, and a lot of people were healed through this man when the denomination was started.

Later, the next leader in the denomination was a man respected by all evangelicals and who's written many books that are very edifying. Some people find them to be the most edifying books they've ever read by this particular author. And yet, the denomination today, I had a friend who was a pastor, and he said he had to leave the denomination.

He said, every time he went to pastor's conferences, they were pushing, pushing, pushing the three Bs, which are bodies, bricks, and bucks. These are the measures of church growth. More bodies, more bricks, that is bigger buildings, and more bucks.

And if a pastor could show up at the convention and say, our church has added 25% more attendants, our budget has increased by half a million dollars this year, this past year. We're adding on a new wing. That was the sign that the church was alive and successful.

This was the measure of success for a church in the eyes of that denomination. And I won't name them because it could be any denomination. That's how churches eventually go.

They start out with a living movement, and then they learn how to keep perpetuating it mechanically. And then they begin to look to signs of growth that aren't really signs of spirituality. And then they promote those things that people consider to be growth in life in a church.

But all the while, they go dead. And I'm not saying every denomination has gone dead. But I'm saying that there is that tendency.

There's that tendency to compromise on the radical zeal that often existed when a movement began. Almost all denominations begin with zealous people. I mean, they come from somewhere.

They're either new converts to a movement, or they come out of another movement, which

means they're more excited about the new thing than the old one they were in. There's some enthusiasm. There's some often love for God, often a zeal for the kingdom.

But give it a generation or two, and the movement just runs like a machine. And they just need the pastor there to turn the crank to keep the gears moving. And they're dead.

But the gears are still moving. There's a great deal of flesh, a great deal of human effort expended in turning the crank, and the gears still move. So everyone looks at it and says, this is a living church.

But it's not a living church. It's dead. Now, I'm not the judge of that.

Jesus certainly is. And Jesus is the one who said this particular church was like that. Still, everyone thought it was a living church, but it wasn't.

It was dead. Its works were not perfect before God. They apparently had works that were decent.

But decent and perfect are not the same. And, of course, you might say, well, nobody's perfect. How could Jesus hold such a standard to a church that had perfect works? Well, perfect, in this sense, no doubt, means if you go down and look at the roots, that you have perfect motivations.

Christians can have perfect motivations and yet fall short of their intentions. But many times their intentions shift from what is pleasing to God, what a church ought to be governed by, perfect love, for example, as John calls it in his epistle. Perfect love is the best motivation for any kind of religious or Christian works.

And often that is what happens. You know, the Church of Ephesus we read, they were doing many good works, but they had left their first love. And so I'm assuming that the imperfection of their works had something to do with what was below the surface, not what was above the surface.

The works they were doing were sufficient to impress outsiders looking in. That's why they had a name, that they were alive. People looked on and said, those works, that church has good works.

Jesus looked and saw, this is just pumping up a corpse. This is just something under the surface is not as it should be. And I suspect it was the motivations had shifted from that of pleasing the Lord to probably pleasing men in the sense of, hey, we've got a good reputation.

We don't lose that. Let's keep our reputation good. And when you begin to worry about your reputation before men, well, as Paul said in Galatians 1 10, if I were yet trying to please men, I would not be the servant of Christ.

You can't please man and Christ consistently. So he tells them to remember how they had

received and heard, apparently what their original message as they understood it was when they first got saved or began as a church, which was probably much a purer message. Now, we don't know when they were established as a church.

They were a church in Asia. And in Acts, it says that while Paul spent two and a half or three years in Asia, that actually he spent the time in Ephesus. It says all Asia heard the gospel.

Paul might have made forays out of Ephesus to these nearby cities and evangelize, or he might have sent people like a Paphos or Paphroditus out to evangelize the cities nearby and to report back to him as he would later, for example, send Timothy to Ephesus when Paul was no longer there. In any case, this church was probably founded when the other churches of Asia were. While Paul was in Ephesus and probably through some Pauline effort, either Paul himself or one of his associates going and preaching the gospel obviously would have had an uncompromising message.

Paul was not a man to compromise, and he didn't associate with workers who were interested in compromise. And so the message these people had heard was an uncompromising kingdom of God, lordship of Jesus message, the very message Paul preached, that you've been bought with a price, you're not your own, you lay down your rights. And, you know, when people get saved in that message, it's life giving.

It sounds like it's a death message, like death to self. Well, it is. That's the irony.

He that seeks to save his life will lose it, but he that loses his life for my sake will find it, Jesus said, and that's the irony of it. When you died yourself, then you really have the life of God in yourself and in your congregation. But it sounds like they've moved away from what they first heard.

We don't know exactly all the influences that caused them to do that. But he says, remember, don't you remember how you have received and heard? Now you need to get back that. You need to go back to that.

Hold fast to that and repent. Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. Now, many times the words that Jesus uses in speaking to these churches has some kind of a connection to their geographical or cultural or historical background.

And it is said that this church more than once actually had succumbed to invaders. Of course, they had a very long history and many kingdoms invaded it over the years. But twice it had fallen to invaders because the watchman was not aware.

The watchman was not paying attention. And that was a great embarrassment. It's an embarrassment when you lose a war you didn't have to lose because your watchman was asleep and just didn't sound the trumpet.

And this had apparently happened on two occasions to this city in its past. And so it is twice warned to watch. Now, it's the church, not the city, that's told to watch.

But because the people were from the city, they would recognize, no doubt, the cultural and historical illusion. Because he said in verse 2, be watchful and strengthen the things which remain. And then he says in verse 3, if you will not watch, well then what? You're going to be invaded again, this time by Jesus.

He says, I will come upon you as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. Now, this coming of Jesus as a thief reminds us of what Jesus said at the end of Matthew 24 when he said that if the watchman, if the good man of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, he would have stayed awake. And he would not allow his house to be broken into.

And therefore said to his disciples, watch, for you do not know at what hour your Lord may come. And so he used the thief analogy. Peter uses it and Paul uses it too.

Paul uses it in 1 Thessalonians 5, where he says, I don't need to tell you that the Lord's going to come like a thief. And in 2 Peter 3, Peter says the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. So this thief in the night or this thief image is generally used about the second coming of Christ.

And it may be here. However, of course, this church, Sardis, doesn't exist anymore. And Jesus hasn't come back yet.

So either his threat was not realized or his threat was not about the second coming of Christ. Now, what I pointed out earlier is in these letters, quite a few of the churches are told that Jesus would come to them, but not in the same sense. In every case, the church of Ephesus in chapter 2 and verse 5 was told, if you don't repent to the first verse, I will come to you quickly.

Jesus said, I will come quickly to you. That's what he says to this church. I will come to you as a thief.

I will come. But in Ephesus in chapter 2, verse 5, he says, I will come to you and remove the lampstand. That is, I will come and extinguish the light of your church.

This is not the second coming of Christ that Ephesus is threatened with. It's just the end of their world as a church. It's the end of their tenure.

And likewise, other churches are told that he would come to them. The church of Pergamos was said in verse 16. Jesus said, repent or else I'll come to you quickly and we'll fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

And the church of Thyatira was told in chapter 2 and verse 25, hold fast what you have till I come. Now, these churches are gone now. These churches don't exist.

And he hasn't come yet. He told them to hold fast until he comes. If they don't repent, he's going to come and fight against them.

One gets the impression that these churches did not repent, or at least their repentance was not long-lasting enough because he must have fulfilled his threat. They're gone. He came and fought against them.

This is not the second coming, in other words. Likewise, we know very well in Laodicea, chapter 3, verse 20, Jesus said, behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him.

So these references to Christ's coming, though on the surface we might see them as references to his second coming, which is still future, would appear to be some kind of interim coming, some kind of historical coming, some event of chastening or judgment that brought an end to the church's career. And that apparently has happened. Now, one hint that this threat, although he uses the language that we associate with the second coming, I'll come as a thief, one reason to think it may not be referring to the second coming, he says, if you do not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.

Apparently he's saying if you do watch, you will know. If you do watch, you will be forewarned. Yet, with reference to the second coming, Jesus says you need to watch because you won't know.

Even if you're watching, you won't know at what hour your Lord will come. He's going to come at an hour that you think not, or at an hour that you don't expect him. So, the second coming, no matter how watchful you are, you'll be surprised, but you better watch anyway.

The word watch, by the way, doesn't mean what we think. We watch television. And that means you sit and vegetate and keep your eyes glued on a particular object and you're watching it.

Or you watch your neighbor's kids, and that means you try to keep track of where they're running around and what they're doing. You're watching them in that sense. The word watch in the Bible literally means to stay awake, to lose sleep.

That's why the Bible sometimes speaks of watching and fasting together. Watching is sacrificing sleep. Fasting is sacrificing food.

These are things that are sometimes joined with prayer. Prayer, watch unto prayer. Pray with watching.

Jesus said to the disciples, can't you watch with me for one hour? Why that? They fell asleep. They couldn't stay awake for one hour. Watch is a term that means stay awake.

Now, you should stay awake at all times in any case. Whether you know or don't know when Jesus is coming. Some people think, I'm watching for Jesus.

That means I'm supposed to have some visual awareness of his nearness of his coming. And so people talk about watching for the signs of the times and so forth. There are no signs of the times.

At least Jesus didn't name any. Jesus said it would be like the days of Noah. People ate and drank.

They were given in marriage. Did normal things that people do every day until the day... It says they didn't know until the flood came and took them away. And it wasn't just because they were unbelievers.

Because he told the disciples, you watch because at a time you don't expect your Lord will come. No one's going to know when it's going to be. Even the day before.

Maybe even the same day. No one will know. He's going to come when he's unexpected by both the world and his people.

And you ask, well then why watch? Because staying awake is your obligation. You're watching because you're a watchman. And a watchman warns people.

That there is a danger. We don't have to say he's coming on May 18th or anything like that. We can simply say though, God is going to call you to account.

And we're warning the world. We need to be watchful. We need to not give up our watch.

Not fall asleep. Not become spiritually lazy. And he says, if you watch, he implies, then I will not come upon you as a thief.

You will know at what hour I'm coming. And therefore, I think it's probably some kind of historical threat that would come upon the church. And if the church is aware, they'll be able to spot it and not be surprised by it.

Perhaps prepare against it. But if it's the second coming, he'll still come at a time you don't think. Whether you're watching or not.

At least according to Matthew 24. Now he says, you have a few names, even in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments. Think of how he words that.

You have a few names, even in Sardis, there's a few. Not many, but a few. Imagine that, in a city like that.

In a church like that to have, even there, there's a few good people. It makes it sound like the overall picture is very discouraging. Only a few names.

But it does mean that Jesus knows his remnant by name. He knows their names. He didn't say a few people.

A small group. He says, there's a few names there that I know. There's some people there that are my friends.

I know them by name. Even in Sardis, where I don't have many friends. They have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments. This too is very possibly an allusion to something culturally relevant to the people of Sardis. The town was known for its manufacture of woolen products.

And also red dye. Now, he didn't say, they'll walk with me in red garments. That would have been a very direct allusion to what the town was known for producing.

On the other hand, red as a color of blood might think to be suited to produce white garments. Based upon Revelation 7, verse 14. Because in Revelation 7, verse 14, John said to the elder that was speaking to him, Sir, you know who these people are.

And he said to me, these are the ones who come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Now, one would not usually think of blood as a whitening agent. But these have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

There's obviously an anomaly here. And it may be that a town known for its red dye might be reminiscent of the blood of Jesus that would whiten garments. I don't know.

In any case, that they would wear white garments is something that is promised to actually a number of the overcomers in the churches. The church of Laodicea is told that they should buy from him white garments. So they would not be naked and ashamed.

A white garment, what is that? Well, Revelation actually seems to answer that question. Revelation chapter 19 and verse 8 speaks about the bride. And it says of the bride of Christ, the bride of the Lamb.

In Revelation 19, 8, to her was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright. For the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. That doesn't say it's white, but of course that's what a bride wears.

If she's a virgin. If she's pure, and this bride is depicted as a pure woman. She wears a white, probably white, clean and bright linen.

Bride's gown. And her linen that she wears is her righteous deeds. She's clothed with her righteous behavior.

That's no doubt the white that we walk in before God in all these cases that it's mentioned. Now Revelation 3, 5, he who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments. And I will not blot his name from the book of life.

But I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. Now, I will not blot his name from the book of life. It's one of the more perplexing statements in Revelation.

A book with many perplexing statements. This would rank high among them. Now the problem is not so much that a name can be blotted out of a book.

Although it would certainly challenge any doctrine of eternal security or perseverance of the saints. To imagine that God had written somebody's name in the book of life. And then for whatever reason would expunge the name.

That suggests that they were once saved, but now they're not saved anymore. Now I don't have any particular problem with those implications because I think that is a possibility. What's difficult is harmonizing this statement with other things in the book of Revelation about the book of life.

Not least of which is that when it's talking about the beast. And the deception that he gives, that he brings about. In Revelation 13, 8 it says, Now some people would say, well it's the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world.

Others say the names were written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. Both seem to be affirmed by Christians from this verse. If indeed one's name has been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

Then that means that God somehow foreknew that that person would be saved. But did he not also foreknow that they would have their name expunged? Why not just leave it out? Why put it in there and expunge it? The book of life is no doubt a symbolic picture. God doesn't need books to keep track of things actually.

He's got a better memory than we do. And I need to look things up in books. I need to write things down in journals and keep track of my expenses and things like that in writing.

God doesn't need books like that. He is anthropomorphized in this reference to him having books with the records in it and so forth. No doubt the book of life is simply a symbol of being a citizen of heaven.

Remember Jesus said to his disciples in Luke chapter 10, Don't rejoice that the demons are subject to you. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven. He didn't use the word book of life, but that's obviously saying you're saved.

Rejoice in that. You're a citizen of heaven. You're on the register of citizens in that town.

Heaven. And so also the book of life no doubt has the same information. The citizenship of heaven.

Now it says at the end of Revelation chapter 20, that all whose names were not found written in the book of life, anyone whose name was not written in the book of life, it says, was cast into

the lake of fire. That's hell. So if your name's not in the book, it's hell.

If your name is in the book, you're apparently saved. You belong to heaven. It's your citizenship.

Now the idea that your name could be removed from the book of life only makes sense in a sense if the names were not written there before the foundation of the world. If the names were written there before the foundation of the world, they were put there because the persons in question were going to be in heaven. Because they were going to persevere.

But these people don't. A person who overcomes in Revelation is one who's faithful unto death. A person who does not overcome, bails.

Maybe under the threat of torture or death, I mean they lapse. A lapse is not an overcomer. And the implication is that if you are an overcomer, you will not have your name blotted out of the book.

What's that imply? That's the statement. What's implied, if you're not an overcomer, it will be blotted out. Not that it'll never be written in there.

You can't blot a name out that isn't already in there. The name's already in there, but it'll be blotted out. It certainly strongly sounds as if one can be saved at one point, but if they do not persevere to the end, they can no longer be saved.

This is certainly not the only passage that gives that impression, but it is one. Now, in all fairness, a Calvinist could say, and sometimes they do say, he doesn't say anyone's names will be blotted out. He just says that overcomers will not have their name blotted out.

For all we know, people who aren't overcomers will also not have their name blotted out. But that would seem to make the promise rather hollow. If you overcome, I'll do the same thing for you that if you don't overcome, I'll do it for you.

Keep your name in the book. The strong implication is it can be removed, and if so, it seems like those who are saved could someday not be saved if they defect, if they apostatize from Christ, if they deny him. And Paul certainly, I mean, I don't want to go into all the scriptures that might suggest such a thing.

There are very many, but I think immediately of 2 Timothy 2, where Paul seems to be quoting some kind of a statement of faith or a hymn. At least most translators treat this material as if it's like a song or a hymn that the early church sang, which Paul quotes. They set it off as a rather like a poem than a normal paragraph.

And in 2 Timothy 2.11, it says, this is a faithful saying, and then he quotes it. For if we died with him, we shall also live with him. If we endure, we shall also reign with him.

If we deny him, he also will deny us. Now, who's us? It's Paul, Timothy, and perhaps everyone else like Paul and Timothy who are believers. If we endure, that is if we stay faithful, we'll reign

with him.

However, if we deny him, he will deny us. What would the ramifications of that be on the Day of Judgment, if Jesus denies us? I don't know what hope we'd have. If Jesus denies knowing me, I don't know of anything that could get me in.

Remember Jesus' words, I never knew you, depart from me, you cursed. In Matthew 7, he said many will hear him say, if we deny him, he'll deny us. He'll deny that he knows us apparently.

Now, of course, the next verse is sometimes grabbed on by people who want to support eternal security. They say, if we are faithless, he remains faithful. He cannot deny himself.

This is sometimes understood to mean that if I don't have any faith, at least he's going to stay faithful to me. If I defect, if I become an unbeliever, that doesn't change anything because God's faithful. He's going to still keep his promises, even if I'm an unbeliever.

What promises? He's just promised if we deny him, he'll deny us. He's faithful. He'll do what he said he would do.

That's what a faithful person does. He says if you endure, you'll reign with me. If you deny me, I'll deny you.

You don't believe it? Well, it's still true. My words are faithful. That's how Paul introduces it in verse 11.

This is a faithful saying. You don't believe it? It's still a faithful saying. He remains faithful.

His words remain reliable. Even if you have trouble believing it. Maybe you think you're going to get away with it, denying Christ and him not denying you.

Don't count on it. His words are still faithful. He's still faithful.

He'll keep his threats as well as his promises. Because he cannot deny himself. He can deny us, but he can't deny himself.

He will deny us if we deny him. This is one of many, many passages in Paul and Peter and James and Revelation. That do sound like a person can pass from being a believer to being an unbeliever.

And with that passing, pass from being saved to being unsaved. Now the next church is the Church of Philadelphia. This is one of the two that Jesus has nothing negative to say about.

So it's refreshing. He only has positive things to say and promises to make to them. This city of Philadelphia was actually a fairly small city in population by this time.

It was in an area that received more than its share of earthquakes. In fact, I mentioned that Sardis had been destroyed in an earthquake in 17 AD. So was Philadelphia.

Both churches, both cities were destroyed in those earthquakes. But Philadelphia had more earthquakes than most. So much so that people were often afraid to live in the city.

The earthquakes would drive people out of the city and they'd wait until they thought it was safe. And once the rubble had been cleared and built up, they'd go back in. But then another earthquake would drive them out.

They'd go out and in and out and in over a period of decades. The population would vacillate from having more or less people. But in general, people were afraid to live in the city.

So not an awful lot of people lived there anyway. It's interesting that Jesus promises them in verse 12. He that overcomes, I'll make a pillar in the temple of God and he shall go out no more.

You don't have to worry about earthquakes here in the temple of God. You've got a stable place. You're a pillar.

And you won't have to run for the hills even when there's shaking going on. But this promise is part of a whole fabric of his message to the church of Philadelphia. And he says to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, write, These things says he who is holy, he who is true, he who has the key of David, he who opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens.

I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it. For you have a little strength, have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Indeed, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not, but lie. Indeed, I will make them come and worship before your feet and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept my command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial, which shall come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth.

Behold, I come quickly. Hold fast what you have that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God and he shall go out no more.

And I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God. And I will write on him my new name. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Now, Jesus introduces himself differently in this epistle than any of the previous ones, both in this one. Well, this one primarily he departs from the pattern in most of the openings of the epistles. He takes the description of himself, which he gives, from elements in chapter 1, where John saw the vision and he had eyes like a flame of fire and robed down to his feet and a sharp sword coming out of his mouth and had seven stars in his hands and so forth.

These descriptive elements are selected from each letter as Jesus describes himself. I'm the one who has the eyes like a flame of fire and the feet like bronze. I'm the one who has the sword and so forth out of my mouth.

This is an exception. This is the first letter he actually doesn't borrow from that vision. And I don't know why this is different, but he apparently has something else to emphasize to this particular church.

Certainly his word to them in verse 8 is I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it. And so perhaps he introduces himself as he does in order to emphasize that point, because he says, I am he that is true. He who has the key of David, he who opens and no one shuts.

So I have an open door in front of you. No one's going to shut it. And I also shut and no one opens.

Now, those words are in italics, because although they're not a direct quote, they're almost a direct quote from Isaiah 22. Now, in Isaiah, it's an interesting context because there's a man named Eliakim there who is replacing another man in the administration of Hezekiah, the king of Judah. The man he's replacing is named Shebna, the scribe.

We read that Shebna is being ejected from office. We don't read this as a decision that's made by Hezekiah. We read as apparently a decision made by God.

God is displeased with Shebna. We don't know why. Some think he's arrogant.

Some think he's come from another country. He's not a Jew and he's insinuated into the Jewish government in a way that he should not. There's no real knowledge of what he has done wrong, but God's not pleased with him.

He says, you're gonna be thrown out like a ball out in the woods. And he says, I'm going to give your belt and your position and your badge, as it were, to another man named Eliakim, my servant, Eliakim, the son of Hezekiah. So reads verse 20.

And he talks about in the later verses how Eliakim is going to have all the privileges of office that Shebna once had. It says in verse 21, I will commit your responsibility into his hand. That is Shebna's into Eliakim's hands.

He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. The key, verse 22, the key of the house of David. I will lay on his shoulder so that he shall open and no one shall shut and he shall shut and no one will open.

Now, this obviously is the verse from which Jesus is drawing the description of himself. And yet in its original setting, it's not a statement about the Messiah. It's a statement about a man named Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, who's actually been elevated to a political office in Jerusalem in the reign of Hezekiah.

However, it's a responsible position. Actually, it is a position that is said to be over the house. This was the position that Shebna had, verse 15.

The steward to Shebna, who is over the house. This is the same expression that was used of

Joseph in Potiphar's house. When he was elevated to a position of being manager of all that Potiphar had.

It says that he was put over the house. And he was a steward like Shebna was. So, Eliakim is being made a steward, a high-ranking steward in the house of King Hezekiah.

The house of David, as it's called. The key to the house of David is on his shoulder. Probably on some kind of a long key ring that he wears over his shoulder.

But the key of the house of David is an authority to open and shut things. That's what keys are for. And the man who has the key is entrusted with access.

With the authority to open and shut things. And he apparently is the only person who has that authority. If he opens it, it's open.

No one can shut it. If he shuts it, that decision is final. No one is going to open it.

This is a high-ranking position. And no doubt, the access that was either granted or denied by this official was access to the king himself. It was the key to the house of David.

The house of David was the palace. It was the king's family. And so, if anyone wished to approach the king in Hezekiah's reign, they had to find the man who had the key who could open the doors.

That could open the way. If they could persuade him to open the doors, then they could go in and see the king. If they couldn't, that door is going to stay shut.

And you couldn't go to anyone. There's no one who could go over his head. If he shut it, it's going to stay shut.

No one opens it if he shuts it. This man has the final say in terms of access to the king. And so, Jesus now appropriates those privileges to the description of himself.

He has the key to the house of David. He is the one who opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens. In other words, he's the one in the house of God, the real king, that will grant access or not to people.

If Jesus says, come in, they're in. No one can shut that door to them. If he says, no, you're out, no one can open it.

Only Jesus is the way. No one comes to the father but through him. Something John, who wrote the book of Revelation, also recorded in John 14 in verse 6. So, the key is the authority to grant access or not.

And therefore, when he says to them, I set before you an open door and no one can shut it, he's saying, I have granted you access to the king. I've granted you access to my father, to my

father's throne room. You can go and stand before God and appeal your case as one who had special privileged access granted by none other than Jesus.

And once Jesus has granted it, there's no one can cancel his decision. Now, on the other hand, if he shut the door, if he said, you're not going to go see my father, then no one can get you in there. Mohammed can't do it, Confucius can't do it, Buddha can't do it, Krishna.

No one can open that door for you if Jesus has it shut. You got to talk to him about it. You got to get his permission.

You got to get access through him. That's what the key of David and these privileges that he describes of himself mean. Now, why would he say that to this church? We don't know for sure, but the very next thing he says to them in verse 9 is, Indeed, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but in lie.

Indeed, I'll make them come and worship before your feet and know that I have loved you. Now, there's another church that had problems with the same kind of people. People that Jesus said they said they're Jews, but they're not.

They're really a synagogue of Satan. Only he said, I know the blasphemy of those who say they're Jews and are not. The church of Smyrna in chapter 2 apparently was having conflicts in chapter 2 verse 9 with the Jewish community in Smyrna.

Smyrna, as I said, had the largest Jewish community of any of the cities in the book of Revelation. And apparently an influential group, the Jewish community, and they, like in many other places, opposed the Christians. Apparently, the church of Smyrna was experiencing persecution because of this, partly.

And Jesus gave them encouragement. I know what those people are doing to you. But now in Philadelphia, apparently the Jewish community in that church is also needing to be addressed by Christ.

And what he says is probably significant. He says, I will make those who claim to be Jews, but as far as Jesus says, they're not real Jews. They're a synagogue of Satan.

But I'll make those people come and worship before your feet. Now, that doesn't mean they'll worship you. Might sound like it.

But the Bible says, Jesus says, Revelation teaches, that we're going to sit on the throne with him. Every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. They're going to bow to him.

If we're sitting there on the throne, they'll be doing so at our feet. We will not be the objects of their worship, though, of course. Jesus will be, but they will be at our feet because we'll be standing or sitting with Christ as they are bowing before him.

But the point here is not that they will worship him so much or that they'll worship at our feet, but that they will know and acknowledge that I have loved you. Now, this seems to be saying, I will vindicate you in their eyes. They apparently don't think that you are loved by God.

You're Gentiles, after all. You're Christians. Many times the Jews felt that they were the only ones who were the chosen people.

And they, I mean, not all Jews had an equally bad attitude about this. And there have been Jews who have been friendly with Christians, of course. And there have been Jews who become Christians.

But there have been times and places where the Jewish community was particularly unfriendly to the Christians. And no doubt in this case, the Jews in this particular town were suggesting to the Christians that the Christians, being Gentiles, were not especially loved by God. And suggesting, you're Jesus can't let you into heaven.

God won't acknowledge you because you're not one of us. You're not of the seat of circumcision. You're not circumcised.

You're not one of the seat of Abraham. And Jesus apparently is saying, regardless what they say, I've opened the door for you. And they can't shut it.

No one can shut it. They can't say that you can't come before God. That's not their decision.

That's mine. And the day will come when they'll acknowledge that. The day will come when they will acknowledge that I have loved you.

Now this promise in verse 10 will detain us a little bit because of its, the way it is commonly understood differently than I think it should be. Verse 10 says, because you have kept my command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial, which shall come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth. Now here there is a reference to an hour of trial.

And it says it will come on the whole world. Now you know that Revelation is generally understood in popular evangelical circles these days as being about a future tribulation time. And not just future, but global.

In fact, some would say there is no trial that has ever come on the whole world before. So this must be a future tribulation such as we read of later in the book of Revelation. The plagues and the beast and the harlot and all those things.

Those are part of a global disastrous period of time called the tribulation. This is the futurist view on this. And they say that is the hour of trial that Jesus talks about that will come on all the world to test those who dwell on the earth.

Now he says to this church, I will keep you from that hour of trial. Remember dispensations

often believe that the churches, the seven churches that are listed here represent seven segments of the whole church age period. And that as you go from Ephesus to Laodicea, you are moving from John's time to the end of the world and the church in the end times.

And they believe that the church of Philadelphia corresponds to the faithful church in the last days. Whereas the church of Laodicea, the apostate church in the last days. And it is their belief, at least the belief of many dispensations, certainly it is the only view I have ever heard them express about this.

And I have heard many of them do so because I was a dispensational teacher myself and I said it too. Was that the church of Philadelphia represents the faithful church in the end times. And because it is faithful, he will keep that church from the tribulation, the hour of trial that is coming on the world.

And therefore this speaks of a pre-tribulational rapture. Now the church of Laodicea then would be the church that is left behind, that is apostate and is lukewarm. So both churches, Philadelphia and Laodicea belong to the end times and they would say both exist today because they believe we are in the end times.

Therefore we get to choose, will I be part of the Laodicean church or part of the Philadelphia church? Will I be faithful and be raptured before the tribulation or will I be in the Laodicean church and keep doing religion through the tribulation period? And this verse is counted as a direct promise of a pre-tribulational rapture of the church. When I was a dispensationalist, there were a score of passages in the Bible that I thought taught a pre-tribulational rapture. Some of them were not very explicit.

But there were two passages that I thought were unanswerable. I thought there were two passages that proved beyond a shadow of a doubt a pre-tribulational rapture. One was 2 Thessalonians 2 about that thing, that unnamed thing that has to be removed before the man of sin could rise.

I was quite sure that was the church or the Holy Spirit of the church because that is what I was told. It never occurred to me that it could be something else, which I now consider it is something else. And therefore I don't see 2 Thessalonians 2 as being any kind of a promise of a pre-tribulational rapture.

But one of the strongest, besides 2 Thessalonians 2, was this passage. Because I thought there is no way around it. The church has promised that they will be delivered from the hour of trial.

Not just any hour of trial, but the hour of trial that will come on the whole world. There has never been such an hour of trial in the whole world, so that must be the tribulation. And I knew no other view of revelation than the futurist.

That was a bit limiting. At that time I didn't know that anyone held any other view than that the tribulation was future and all that. So this seemed to me an obvious reference to that

tribulation and to the pre-tribulational rapture.

To my mind, given the presuppositions that we held as dispensations, that was a fairly reasonable conclusion about this verse. But I only say fairly. Because even before I gave up my futurism, even when I still thought the book of Revelation was about the future, I came to the conclusion, grudgingly, that this does not teach a pre-tribulational rapture.

I mean, if there is one, it could be seen to support it. But the question of whether there is one or not could not be determined from this passage, or even very strongly defended from it. And the reason is, because I was taking the promise, I will keep you from the hour of temptation, to mean I will take you away from physically.

I'll take you out of the world. This hour of temptation is coming on the whole world, and I'll get you out of it by taking you out of the world. To keep us from temptation, I thought, required taking us away from the place where the troubles were happening.

And I believed that for a long time, although it took me a while to realize there wasn't any specific reason to believe that that was the only way this promise could be fulfilled. And when I discovered that in John 17, 15, when Jesus was praying for the disciples, in John 17, 15, he prayed this way, I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. Now, the evil one is the prince of this world, and he prays that we be kept from.

And by the way, the term keep from is the same Greek phrase as is found in Revelation 3.10. Ektereo, two Greek words. Ekt means out of, tereo means to guard or protect. To guard out of, to take out of, to keep from.

Ektereo, the very same verb and preposition that are found in Revelation 3.10 is found in this verse. And by the way, those two words are not found together anywhere else in scripture. So, John wrote both books.

In both cases, he's quoting Jesus. And in both cases, he uses a phrase that is found nowhere else except in those two passages. Now, that doesn't mean the same thing is being talked about, but it might be.

But it certainly means this, that in John 17, 15, to be kept from trouble, from the enemy, does not require being taken out of the world, because Jesus specifically says, I do not pray that you take them out of the world. Just keep them from the wicked one. And therefore, it's obvious that to keep people from something doesn't require that you remove them from the planet.

And if there is an hour of temptation coming on the whole world, could Jesus keep us safe from those harms without taking us out of the world? Of course. I mean, the typical analogy is given of Israel and Egypt. When God sends the 10 plagues upon Egypt, many of the plagues in Revelation are direct echoes of the plagues in Egypt.

And yet, when God sent the 10 plagues on Egypt, Israel was still in Egypt. He took them out afterward, but he left them in there for the duration of the 10 plagues. He protected them, and the Bible says in Exodus that God made a difference between Israel and the Egyptians, and so that the plagues would afflict the Egyptians, but not the Israelites who were in their land.

That is to say, God can send plagues on a region and still protect individual people in that region. Look over at Psalm 91. By the way, Psalm 91 is a song that may have been written by Moses.

We don't know that it was. It's anonymous. It's not one of the Psalms of David that we know of, but the previous Psalm is the Psalm of Moses.

And Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses, the man of God. Psalm 91, the author is not given, but there's many allusions to the Exodus. And it could have been written by Moses.

There's allusions to God sending plagues and protecting his people from plagues. And it says in verse 5, let's say, You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. It says in verse 7, A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come near you.

Well, at my right hand is pretty near me. Well, still far enough away, apparently. It doesn't come near enough to hurt you.

People right next to you may fall. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. Only with your eyes you shall look and see the reward of the wicked.

And verse 10 says, No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling. Plague? No plague come near your dwelling. The plagues were poured out in Revelation.

They were also poured out in Egypt. Those are the only two seasons of plagues the Bible talks about. There's a promise that no plague will come near your dwelling, but a thousand will fall right next to you, or ten thousand right next to you, but they're not going to touch you.

God knows how to hit His marks and miss who He doesn't want to hit. He's a good marksman. He's not just dropping a bomb.

He's a sniper. And He knows how to take out the people He wants to take out, and leave standing the ones He wants to leave standing. Israel, He preserved in Egypt while the plagues were coming on Egypt.

Now, look over at Matthew 24, if you would. Matthew 24, I believe in verse 36, Jesus is talking about His second coming. That is disputed.

Obviously, there are people who are preterists who believe He is talking about 70 AD. I take it

that He is talking about the end of the world. In verse 35, He says, But of that day and hour, I take it He means that day and hour when the world passes away, which is at the second coming of Christ.

Until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and took them all away. So also will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field.

One will be taken, and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken, and the other left.

Now, of course, in some circles we've been inclined to see this as referring to the rapture. That, you know, when Jesus comes back, he's going to take the Christian out of the bed and leave the non-Christian spouse there behind. He's going to take the Christian out of the workplace or out of the airplane or out of the car.

And the one left behind is going to be the unbeliever left behind to go through the tribulation. That's the pre-trib rapture understanding of this. However, it's not what Jesus said.

Jesus said it's like the days of Noah. The wicked were just behaving like nothing was coming upon them. And they were oblivious until the flood came and did what to them? Took them all away.

And that's what it'll be when he comes. One will be taken. The other left.

One will be taken. The other left. People in close proximity, one will be taken.

The other will be left. Taken where? Now, in this case, the ones who were taken are likened to those who were taken in the flood. That's in the immediate context.

And in the flood, those who were taken were killed. Now, if you look at the parallel to this in Luke 17, I believe it becomes more unmistakable, more explicit. Luke 17, he says in verse 26 and 27, as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man.

They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. In Matthew, it says the flood came and took them all away. Took them all away means destroyed them all.

But look further down. Verse 34, I tell you in that night, there will be two men in one bed. The one will be taken and the other left.

Two women will be grinding together. One will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field.

The one will be taken and the other left. The disciples said, where? Now, we don't have that question in Matthew 24. We don't have the disciples saying, what? Where? They're taken.

Where are they going? Where are they taken to? See, they hadn't read the late great planet Earth. They didn't know. They didn't know there was going to be a rapture of the church, so they were taken totally by surprise when Jesus said, one will be taken and the other left.

But, his answer is a strange one, because he doesn't say, silly, they're taken into the clouds to be with Jesus. No, he says, oh, where'd they go? Let me answer that question for you. Wherever the corpse is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

Where are they? Well, you can find them. Look for the vultures. Look for the eagles.

Wherever the corpse is, the eagles will be there. So you want to know where they were taken to, they'll be easy to spot. Wherever the corpse is, the eagles will be.

And therefore, when he says, one will be taken, they say, where? He says, well, it's not really going to be that hard to find them. They'll be taken, they'll be destroyed, they'll be killed. One will be taken.

The other, a thousand will fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand. Only with your eyes will you behold and see the reward of the wicked. It will not touch you.

So if God wants to keep us from plagues or any other disasters that he wishes to, even if he wants our next door neighbor or our spouse to suffer that plague, you can be in the same bed and he can take them. Now this doesn't mean he'll rapture them, it means he judges them and kills them, like the people killed in the flood. They didn't go into heaven, but they were taken out of the land of the living.

They were taken out of this life. And so when Jesus said, because you've been faithful to me, I will keep you from that hour of temptation, there's no reason in the world to say this means we have to go out of the world. There's no promise of that, no suggestion of it.

Not a hint. But more than that, there's not really a hint here necessarily of a future tribulation worldwide. Because the word world in the Bible is used differently than we usually use it.

To them, it meant their world. We know more about the world than they did and we use the word with more information implied. We talk about the whole world, we know about Australia and South America and the South Pacific Islands, everything's in the world when we talk about the world.

When they talked about the world, it was basically the Mediterranean world. It was actually the Roman world, the Roman Empire. How do I know that? Well, it's unmistakable.

In Luke chapter 2, verse 1, just for example, it says in the days of Caesar Augustus, there went out a decree from Caesar that all the world should be registered for taxation. So Caesar required everyone in the world to be registered so he could charge taxes from them. Did that include the Incas? How about the Aborigines in Australia? How about the Maoris in New

Zealand? Did Caesar send some guys over there to register those people for taxation? No, the world that he ruled.

It just says the whole world. But it's commonplace in New Testament times for the Roman Empire to be referred to as the world. In fact, Colossians chapter 1 and verse 6, at the end of verse 5, he mentions the truth of the gospel and he picks up from that line in verse 6, which, that is the gospel, has come to you as it also has in all the world and is bringing forth fruit.

Now the gospel has gone to all the world as bringing forth fruit. Of course, not the whole planet Earth, certainly, but it had been essentially through the vast majority of the Roman Empire. That's the whole world he's talking about.

He's not even talking about India, though he knew it was there. He's not talking about South Africa. He knew there were nations south of North Africa, but they weren't in his world.

They weren't in the Roman Empire. The gospel had not gone there, nor did Paul have any suggestion that it had. The whole world, as far as he and his readers were concerned, was the civilized world, the Roman world.

That's what they meant. We sometimes talk about the Muslim world, or the free world, or the communist world. When we talk about the world, we don't always mean the planet, and they hardly ever meant the planet when they talked about the world.

They were talking about the world they lived in, the Roman world. When Jesus says to the church, there's an hour of trial coming on the whole world, this could easily be satisfied simply by an empire-wide crisis, which is coming to test those who dwell on the land. The land would be probably a reference to Israel.

I know it says earth, but the word earth and land are the same in the Greek. I believe that he's promising this church that though there is a crisis, an empire-wide crisis coming upon their world, and there's going to be one effect of it is to test the people who dwell in the land of Israel. That he's talking about something that this church would actually be there to experience, or not, if he's going to keep them from it.

If he's talking about a future tribulation, what, he's going to raise them from the dead and keep them from it? He's talking to people who are alive at the time of whom he was saying, I'm going to keep you from something that is apparently coming in your lifetime. And what would it be? Well, we don't know exactly when Revelation was written, I champion the view that it was written probably before AD 70. There was, just before AD 70, an empire-wide crisis.

Nero, the emperor, committed suicide in 68. Over the next 18 months, the entire capital city of Rome was embroiled in civil wars, a time in which three rulers put themselves into the position of emperor, and each was assassinated by the next guy. One ruled for three months, one for six.

I think, I don't remember if there was one who ruled for one month, but Galba, Otho, and Vitellus were these three men. And in the space of 18 months, there were five different emperors, if you include Nero, who killed himself, then these three, and then eventually Vespasian, and then things stabilized. But during this same period of time, there was a war going on between Rome and Israel.

From 66 AD to 70 AD, Israel was in crisis. The whole empire was in crisis, but Israel was in a crisis of their own. This was a time when no one was escaping disaster.

Those who dwelt in the land were being severely tested, but there was also a trial coming on the whole Roman world. Actually, many historians have suggested, I think Gibbon, the most important of them, said that it's a miracle, and he wasn't a believer, it was a miracle that Rome didn't fall at that time, because it was unstable, and there seemed no way for it to regain its footing until Vespasian came to power. Anyway, this could easily be something that would affect the readers of this letter, the people of Philadelphia, and for Jesus to say, I'm going to protect you through this.

There's a great crisis coming soon, and I'm going to protect you from it. And when he says in verse 11, behold, I come quickly, this coming may be this coming in judgment for this crisis, and it's quick. So he's saying, hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Now, when he promises those who overcome will be a pillar in the temple of his God, it presupposes the knowledge that the church is the temple of God. We, according to 1 Peter 2.5, are living stones being built up in the temple. Each one has a position in the wall or in the structure of the church that the Holy Spirit has given each one.

And these people who are overcomers will be made pillars. Pillars, of course, are that portion of the building that maintains the stability. It supports the weight.

Strong pillars make a building stable. And as Philadelphia was a place subject to earthquakes, the suggestion that the house of God is not going to fall there because there are pillars and that these people who overcome will have that dignity of being important in the church, important in the kingdom of God. And they'll go out no more.

Now, he says he's going to write some things on, several things. I'm going to write on you, if you're an overcomer, the name of God, my God, the name of the city of New Jerusalem, and my new name. I'm not sure what all this means.

The name of the city of New Jerusalem would suggest you'll have, you know, the city's name on you as a badge indicating your citizenship, I suppose. The name of my God written on you is an idea that comes up again in chapter 14 when he says in verse 1, I looked and behold a lamb standing on Mount Zion and with him 144,000 having his father's name written on their foreheads. And this is in contrast to the people in the previous chapter who have the beast's name written on their foreheads.

People either have the name of the beast or the name of God on their foreheads, not literally, of course. But having your owner's name on your forehead was what a slave would be acquainted with. A slave would be branded with his master's name or brand on his forehead or his hand.

And this may be what is suggested. You'll be my slaves. You'll be my servants.

You'll have my father's name, my God, on your forehead. Or he doesn't say on your forehead, but just on you. Anyway, the exact meaning of some of this promise, we'll have to leave undiscussed.

We need to quickly cover one more letter and not give it anywhere near as much time. But that's okay. He's writing to the church of Laodicea last.

And this is a church we know a lot of things about. And there's many allusions to the local things. There's a lot of local color in this letter.

The Laodiceans had a water supply that came from a distant area about six miles out, a place called Denizli. It was a hot spring. Now, you don't drink hot water, of course, but that's okay.

It had time to cool down some. Traveling six miles through aqueducts or rock or whatever it traveled through, it cooled somewhat. Not that much.

It was lukewarm by the time it got to the city. And therefore, it wasn't really potable. It wasn't really water that you'd want to drink.

It's not like you'd dive drink, but it also picked up some undesirable minerals and so forth that made, when people did drink the water, it often made them puke. It made them nauseous. And this city was known for that.

And it's not surprising that Jesus alludes to them being lukewarm and him wanting to vomit them out of his mouth. Also, some other things. The city was a banking center and it was a very rich city.

The church probably was rich also. At least the church was saying so. I am rich.

I have no need of anything. So the church apparently was rich like the general citizenry were. They were also, the town was a producer of black wool clothes and carpets.

As we've seen, many of these cities produce some kind of textiles or wool or something or dye. Black wool clothes and carpets were produced in Laodicea. Ironically, they're naked and need to be clothed, although they are in a town that produces clothing.

Also, and this is rather interesting, the city of Laodicea had a medical school that was famous for producing a powdered substance from Phrygia, I believe, which had been developed there to make into an eye salve so that they treated eye ailments with this powdered substance that

they produced there in the medical school. There are many references to this because he talks about you need to get eye salve so you can see. But see, Jesus takes all these things that are natural things in the culture and he spiritualizes them as we shall see.

To the angel of the church of the Laodiceans, these things says the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. I know your works, that you are neither hot nor cold, or I took that backward, neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot, so then, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you or vomit you.

The word spew is old English, does not mean spit, it means vomit. I will vomit you out of my mouth. These people aren't just in his mouth, he's going to spit them out, they're in his stomach, he's going to vomit them.

They're going to be expelled from the body of Christ. Because you say I'm rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing. And you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

This is ironic because the very opposite thing was said to the church of Smyrna back in chapter 2, verse 9. He says, I know your works, your tribulation, and your poverty, but you are rich. In other words, the church in Smyrna was outwardly in poverty, but he says, spiritually you're in good shape. Smyrna, remember, he had nothing bad to say about.

Laodicea, he had nothing good to say about. And he says, you say you're rich, but I see you as poor. Smyrna saw themselves as poor, but I see them as rich.

God does not judge as man judges. He says, you say I'm rich, but you don't know that you're wretched, miserable. Now, when you go to medical school, you shouldn't have misery and wretchedness.

You're poor. Well, this is a banking center. What are these people doing poor? Blind? What happened to the eyes? And naked? Well, they produce clothing.

How did they get naked? In other words, they're spiritually naked. I'm sure they were dressed well. Their eyes probably worked just fine.

They probably were quite wealthy. And that's why they said they were. I'm rich.

I don't need anything. It's what they thought. A wealthy church.

The more rich you are, of course, the more temptation there is to think you don't need God because the more things you can cover with your own resources. The poorer person, the Bible says, tends to look more to God and trust in God because he knows he has nothing else to lean on. But those who are rich feel like they have need of nothing.

They don't call on God with the same desperate faith that someone might when they are really desperate. So because they are poor, blind and naked, and he says in verse 18, I counsel you to

buy from me gold refined in the fire that you may be rich and white garments. They sold black garments in that town.

But he says, you need some white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed and anoint your eyes with eyesalve that you may see. So we have all these references to things that were that the city was well known for. It's money, it's black clothing, it's eyesalve, it's lukewarm water.

Jesus picks up all that local color and says, you guys are lukewarm yourselves. You're kind of nauseating, frankly. Now by the way, he does not explain what lukewarm means as a spiritual metaphor.

Obviously lukewarm is kind of partway between hot and cold. But what does hot and cold mean? What is it about the church that he's asking them to be different about? Well, he doesn't explain it, however, he does tell them at the end of verse 19, be zealous and repent. And therefore perhaps what they lack in is zeal.

Perhaps we're supposed to be a hot person as zealous for God. Now it's interesting, he says, I'd rather have you cold or hot rather than lukewarm. But if hot means zealous for God, cold might mean zealous against God.

Lukewarm would be, eh, I can take him or leave him. You know, one thing hot and cold people have in common is they're not lukewarm. One thing that people who are zealous for God have in common with people who are zealous against God is they take God seriously.

And while God does not desire people to be zealously opposed to him, at least he appreciates the fact that they take him seriously, no doubt, more than the person who believes in him and just, it doesn't change the way they live, they don't give much time in their thoughts. He's not very important to them. They're not against him or for him, they just don't take him seriously.

And while there's no commendation here of those who are zealously opposed to God, it is actually more undesirable to be lukewarm than to be zealously opposed. Because actually if you're zealously opposed to God, you are taking God seriously, and if you happen to change your mind about God, you'll probably take him seriously in the other direction. If you're lukewarm, you're essentially dead, numb.

You're never going to probably take God much more seriously or less so. It's just kind of bland. God means very little to you.

And that is what had happened to this church, apparently. Now he says in verse 19, as many as I love, I rebuke and chase them. Now, by the way, what does he mean to buy gold and buy clothes and buy ISAF? Does Jesus sell stuff? Well, these things do come at a cost.

He's not literally selling things for money, but what is gold? Gold is refined Christian character. That's what Peter suggests in 1 Peter 1.7, that the trial of your faith being much more precious

than of gold that perishes, though it is tried with fire, might be found in the praise, honor, and glory in the day of Jesus Christ, Peter said in 1 Peter 1.6 and 7. Job said in Job 23.10, when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. I'll be refined through my trials.

You can purchase gold at the cost of trials. You can have good character, but it's going to cost you, it won't be free. You have to endure hardship.

If you never have hardship, luxury is not a good predictor of good character, usually. It does not at least produce it. And so buy gold by pursuing good character, even at the cost of trials and so forth that produce it.

White garments, we know that the white garment is the righteous deeds of the saints. Eyesalve, not sure how they actually are supposed to respond to this, but they are blind spiritually and they need to have their eyes opened. I suppose they ought to say, open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus.

They need to ask to have their eyes opened, like the blind man. When the blind man came to Jesus from Jericho, Jesus said, what do you want? He said, Lord, I want to see. Well, okay, since you asked.

And so if we're blind, we need to ask him to open our eyes. He says, I rebuke and chasten those who I love and therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with me. Now standing at the door, it's not likely that he means here what we often figure that he means, that is that he stands at the door of our heart, knocking. That's a common evangelist appeal we give, Jesus at the door of your heart, knocking.

Please let him in and do him a favor. He's out in the cold there, poor Jesus, don't you feel sorry for Jesus? Please open the door and let him in. And actually, Jesus isn't at your mercy.

You know, we sometimes like to picture gentle Jesus knocking on the door. He's not going to kick the door in. He's a gentleman.

We say, well, true, but he's not there begging either. He gives ultimatums. He commands all men everywhere to repent.

He's not a wimp. And he's not necessarily in this passage portrayed as standing at the door of a person's heart. He's apparently at the door of the church.

He's outside the church. He's supposed to be in the church. The church has put him out and he's pounding on the door trying to get their attention.

Hey, remember me? And this letter is perhaps his knock at that church's door. You've forgotten him. He's knocking.

This letter is his ringing of your doorbell, trying to get your attention. Now, all it takes is one person to hear his voice and open the door. And at least that person will have communion with Christ.

The church might not, but individuals in the church could. There are overcomers. There are remnant people.

If anyone hears my voice, I'll come and sup with him. Typically, the church saw the Eucharistic meal, the communion, as a meal where they ate with Christ at the table. Well, he apparently was not eating at their Eucharistic meetings there.

I'm sure they were having communion in that church. But he was outside. He wasn't in there eating at their feast.

But he says, I'll eat with anyone who will open the door and let me in. Maybe the church will never have communion with Christ. It's too lukewarm.

They may have to be vomited out of the body of Christ. But individuals can still have that kind of communion with Christ. If none go with me, still I will follow.

To him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my father on his throne. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Christ is already seated on the throne next to his father.

He's ruling. And we are promised that we will rule with him if we are overcomers. And having read that verse, I just think it'd be kind of nice to sing that verse.

And so in your books, there's a song, To Him That Overcomes. It's just this verse.

OpenTheo

Revelation 4 - 5

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg provides an analysis of Revelation 4 and 5, which he considers a turning point in the book. He notes that this section describes a vision of heavenly beings and their worship of God. Gregg interprets the four living creatures mentioned in the text as representing different aspects of Jesus, while the 24 elders symbolize the redeemed from both the Old and New Testaments. The discourse emphasizes the importance of fulfilling God's will and purpose, and the rewards that await those who do so.

Transcript

We are coming to the fourth chapter of Revelation, and here we have a turning point. However you divide the book, everyone would call this a turning point, because at this point, John is caught up into heaven, and a series of events begins to take place that doesn't really come to a logical conclusion until maybe chapter 19. The first three chapters have been different than the rest of the book in that they're simply normal epistles, dictated as anyone might dictate an epistle to a group of people.

These are, of course, epistles that Jesus dictated to the church. Churches, the seven churches, but because there are seven, we suspect that this means the whole church. And therefore, in every age, there are probably churches that fit each of these descriptions, and that need the kinds of exhortations and correction and encouragement that these churches receive.

But now, having spoken to the seven churches, John is going to receive a revelation that will occupy many chapters to come with many movements. There will be a scroll with seven seals that must be opened, and they will be opened. There will be seven angels with seven trumpets that must be sounded, and they will be sounded.

There will be other angels later that will have seven bowls of wrath, and those will be poured out. And there are other things, wonders stranger than these. A woman bearing a child with a dragon waiting to kill it.

A beast with seven heads and ten horns coming out of the sea, and another one with two horns like a lamb and a mouth like a lion or a dragon. And stranger things still. And these things are

all about to begin unfolding.

Now the section that lies ahead of us, of course, is subdivisible also. And whenever there's a series of sevens that we will read of, as there was seven letters to seven churches, there will be seven seals here in this next section. There will be seven trumpets and seven bowls in another, succeeding sections.

Before these seven items in every group really are considered individually, they are introduced, sometimes by a greater and sometimes by a lesser detailed introduction. But generally speaking, these events, these series of seven, the seven letters of the seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, these all represent events taking place on the planet. But John, before each seven, is caught up into heaven or at least into the spirit where he sees things that are otherworldly.

In fact, before he gave the seven letters of the seven churches, he had a vision on the island of Patmos in chapter one that he describes, a vision of Christ. Although he himself was on earth, certainly he was transported into a spiritual realm where he saw things that could not be seen by the natural eye. And before the seven seals are broken, there is first an introductory vision where he's caught up into heaven.

Now the breaking of the seals will affect matters on earth. But as in every case, there is a vision in heaven first and then there is what happens on earth. The point seems to be that the things on earth are explained somehow and somewhat by the vision in heaven.

In other words, instead of just seeing a series of calamities, we are given a heavenly vision, a peek behind the curtain, so to speak, to see why they are happening. Preachers have often made the example of seeing a tapestry from the backside. It's just a tangle of strings and knots that seem random and they don't make any sense at all.

But if you happen to see the same tapestry from the other side, which is where the picture is, then all those nonsensical random elements are seen to really conspire to make an intelligible picture. And as we see events on earth that are terrible, calamitous, and deadly and disastrous to people or nations, we see that that doesn't seem to make much sense. Why did that happen? That just seems just wrong.

Well, we don't make sense of it. It's like we're looking at the wrong side of the tapestry. When John is caught into heaven, he sees the tapestry from above.

And he sees that we are looking at the underside of the tapestry where we stand, but he goes up above and he sees the picture. He sees why it is happening. He sees why this makes sense.

And so these heavenly visions that John has that precede the series of judgments are explanatory, so to speak. They basically show what it is that's precipitating these events. In this case, he's caught up in heaven in verse 1 of chapter 4. After these things, I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven.

And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this. Immediately I was in the spirit, and behold, a throne set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he goes on to describe the throne and other things he saw.

But let me just comment here. John says he was in the spirit. That's what he said in chapter 1. He was in the spirit on the day of the Lord, and he saw the vision of Christ.

Now immediately he's in the spirit, and he sees spiritual things. Whether he was actually caught up into the sky, or whether he just had the sensation of being caught up in the sky, and it was more of a vision like it or a dream type of experience. He was in the spirit.

You know, the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 said he knew a man in Christ who about 12 years ago, he said, about 12 years ago, this man was caught up into the third heaven. But Paul said, whether in the body or out of the body, I'm not really sure. Now most commentators believe that Paul is speaking about himself, and there are reasons to think that, as far as the flow of thought before and after it go.

But he's saying, if this is true, he's saying, I was caught up in the third heaven, but I don't know whether I was in the body or out of the body. I don't know if I really moved from the planet Earth or not. I don't know if I was just experiencing a spiritual revelation, or whether I really traveled somewhere.

And that is probably what John would have said to you after this revelation. He probably said, I don't really know if I ever left Patmos, but certainly in my awareness, in this vision, in the spirit, I was caught up into heaven. I saw things there that were helpful in explaining why other things were going to happen on Earth.

Now I should point out that since one of the most popular views of Revelation is the dispensational futurist view, you may find, if you have not already, that teachers will say that this verse, chapter 4, verse 1, is the rapture of the church. It seems evident that it is at this point that a turning point has been reached. The so-called tribulation follows this point.

Before this point, we have only the letters to the churches. It is sometimes said, very often in fact, that in the first three chapters, the word church or churches appears 19 times in chapters 1 through 3. But that word church or churches does not appear any time after chapter 4, verse 1. Well, they mean on Earth. In chapter 22, yeah, but that's after everything's over.

That's kind of in the epilogue, right? But they mean in the description of events, the church is not mentioned again after this. Well, the word church, it is true, is not found in during the series of events that's called the tribulation from chapter 4 through 19, is the tribulation section. And you won't find the word church in those chapters.

But that's somewhat an irrelevant point to make, because if that is meant to say the church has been removed from the Earth, that is using the word church to mean the global church, the

universal church has been removed from the Earth, not just some congregation here or there. And although the word church and churches is found 19 times in the first three chapters, it never means the universal church. It's always the church of Ephesus, the church of Smyrna, the church of this town, the seven churches.

It's referring to local assemblies. It's not talking about the global church. There is no teaching there that specifically addresses the body of Christ as a whole, which is what the rapture would affect if we're talking about the rapture.

The absence of any reference to the word church after this point is simply that no more letters are being addressed to the church. The reason there's 19 appearances is because seven times it says to the church of, the angel of the church of, and seven times it says, he that has ears to hear the letter of the spirit says to the churches. So you've got seven of those and seven of the addresses.

That makes 14. And in chapter one, there's five that talk about take the letter to the seven churches, to the church of, and the church of, and the church of. So essentially the occurrence of the word church in Revelation never refers to the universal church.

And the reason it appears so frequently in the first three chapters is because that contains seven letters, each of which contains the word church twice. That makes for a high concentration of the use of that word. There are no more letters to the churches anymore after this, and therefore the word church doesn't occur.

However, other words that are synonymous with the church do. For example, if you look at chapter 13 and verse seven, speaking of the beast, it says it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. In verse 10, it says, he who leads into captivity should go into captivity.

He who kills with a sword must be killed with a sword. Here is patience and faith of the saints. The persecution of the beast is directed toward the saints.

The saints are called to persevere. In chapter 14 and verse 12, it says, here is the patience of the saints. Here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Well, who we might ask keeps the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, if not the church? Well, the dispensationalist knows these verses are here, and they say, well, that's not a problem. That's not the church. That's the saints who are converted during the tribulation after the church is gone.

These are what they call the tribulation saints. They don't belong to the body of Christ. The body of Christ belongs to the church age.

The church age ends at the rapture, and then the church is gone. After that, there will be people saved, but they will not become part of the body of Christ or the bride of Christ. They're

not the church.

They are the saved, the elect, the Jews who get saved, the 144,000, the people they convert. Those are simply the tribulation saints. They're a different category than the church.

Well, I dare say, why should I believe you when you tell me that? Is there some reason for saying so? Yes, because we place the rapture in chapter 4, verse 1, so it necessitates that the church is not the saints. Now, if there's not a better reason than that, I'll pass. Thank you.

I'm not going to be convinced by an argument that has no arguments in its favor, and besides, they're wrong. If you look at chapter 19, verses 7 and 8, Revelation 19, 7 and 8, it says, this is at the end of all this, it says, let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready. Now, the Lamb is Christ.

His wife can be little else than the church, certainly, and it talks about this bride, this wife of the Lamb. In verse 8, to her was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. So, the church is dressed in the righteous acts of the saints.

Would that not suggest that the saints are the church saints? How could the church come to be dressed in the righteous acts of some group that was not the church? Some tribulation saints that aren't part of her. Obviously, if you do a concordance study of the word saints in the New Testament, you'll find that in every case outside of Revelation, the word saints refers to the church or the Christians. There is no reason to believe that Revelation is an exception to that rule.

There's nothing in Revelation that says the saints are not the church, and in Revelation 19, 8, it says that the church is indeed arrayed in the righteous deeds of the saints, obviously saying the saints in Revelation are the same people the saints are in Romans or Corinthians or Thessalonians or any other book in the New Testament. The saints are the church, the followers of Christ. So, indeed, the church is seen in the intervening chapters after this.

But there's more in argument for chapter 4, 1 being a reference to the rapture of the church. They say John being caught up into heaven is like the church being caught up into heaven at the rapture. He says he heard a voice like a trumpet speaking, saying, come up here.

So he's called up into heaven by a trumpet-like voice. Doesn't that sound like the rapture as it is described in other places? For example, 1 Corinthians chapter 15. It says in verse 52, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible and we, the church living, will be changed.

When? When there's a sound of a trumpet. And even more closely verbally similar would be, of course, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, probably the most famous passage about the rapture. In fact, one of the two in the Bible.

Not much competition to be the most famous one since there's only two, but the other one. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 describes the rapture in these terms in verse 16 and 17. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trumpet of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Now, when? When there's a sound of a trumpet, there's a voice of an archangel, there's a voice, there's a trumpet. John says in Revelation 4.1, after these things I looked, behold, a door opened in heaven and the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet, speaking, saying, come up here.

There's a voice like a trumpet. That certainly sounds like the rapture. Well, it might sound somewhat like the rapture, but if you look at Revelation 1.10, Revelation 1.10 says, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a loud voice as of a trumpet.

Was this also the rapture? John heard a voice like a trumpet in chapter 1, verse 10. He heard a voice like a trumpet in chapter 4, verse 1. In both cases, it resulted in him being in the Spirit, or he was in the Spirit before he heard the voice. In any case, it was a spiritual experience he was having.

He was not physically caught up, or if he was, so what? It's not the rapture. To say that John being caught up into heaven is a type or a picture of the church being caught up requires that we would have an answer to the question, what makes you think that John's geography corresponds to the geography of the church? Is there anything that makes that obvious, that that would be the case? And if it is the case, does John going up represent the church going up? But when John comes down again, the church comes down. After all, John comes down and measures the temple in chapter 11.

And then he's up in heaven again in chapter 14. And then he's down on earth again in a wilderness in chapter 17 where he sees the harlot. He's going up and down like a yo-yo.

Is the church following him? Is there a rapture and then there's a descent and another rapture and descent? Of course not. John is all over the place because wherever there's something to be seen and described, he is transported there in the Spirit. His movements do not correspond with the movements of anyone other than himself.

He does not represent the church going up, and therefore everything about the arguments for Revelation 4, 1 being the rapture, simply are vacuous. There's not one valid argument here. And so all we know is that John was caught up to heaven, and that's all we need to know because he's going to describe what he saw.

Now what he saw, in my opinion, is not what you or I would see, for example, if you would die today and go to heaven. He's going to see and describe things that are, to my mind, symbolic. When you go to heaven, you'll see things as they are.

John sees them as they are depicted in a symbolic form, I believe. Now obviously you're at liberty to disagree with me on that, and it wouldn't make any difference whatsoever whether you were right or I was right. There's no reason to argue about it, but I'm simply letting you know.

I am not assuming that what John describes is what we will see. I don't expect to see God holding a scroll with seven seals on it. I don't expect to see Jesus as a lamb with seven eyes and seven horns, which John will see.

I don't expect to see creatures that are like the four living creatures, necessarily. I don't think the actions that are described are literally going on. I think that what he's given us is an impression of what heaven is like and what the inhabitants of heaven are occupied with, and more importantly, what was taking place in heaven that precipitated the events that we will read of in chapter 6, which is the breaking of the first six seals.

He is setting things up here for us to see in chapter 5 a scroll with seven seals, a presentation of a mystery. What's in this scroll? Who's going to open this? And at first the tension mounts as we shall see a loud voice out of heaven says, who is worthy to open this scroll and break the seals? And initially no one is worthy, and it looks like the story is going to end right there, and then of course Jesus appears. So it's all done very dramatically, but the point is the vision in heaven, which occupies chapters 4 and 5, is setting the stage for the breaking of the seven seals and giving, I believe in a symbolic manner, something of an explanation of why these events are taking place.

Now I'll read it to you, and then I'll talk about the details. First chapter 4, immediately verse 2, I was in the spirit, behold a throne set in heaven, and one sat on the throne, and he who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance, and there was a rainbow around the throne in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were 24 thrones, and on the thrones I saw 24 elders sitting clothed in white robes, and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

And from the throne proceeded lightning, thunderings, and voices, and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. There they are again. Before the throne there was a sea of glass like crystal, and in the midst of the throne and around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had the face of a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around about within, around about and within, and they do not rest day or night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and who is to come. Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.

Now this is just setting the stage. The chapter division is artificial. The next thing he sees is the throne.

He's already described the inhabitant of the throne, but the fact that he now notices in chapter 5, verse 1, that there's a scroll in his hand becomes the central focus for a few verses. But let's talk about what we've seen so far. He sees a throne and one sitting on it.

No description of the man on the throne, except that he's like a jasper, an asardius stone in appearance, and that doesn't really tell us much. He said, Did you meet so-and-so? Yeah. What did he look like? He looked like a stone, kind of like a stone, like a gemstone, you know, a couple of gemstones, actually.

Well, I mean, that doesn't really tell you anything about what he looked like, and there's a reason for that. Ezekiel also saw the throne of God, and he saw some things reminiscent of this very vision. And Ezekiel described the throne and the chariots and the wheels and the creatures at the four corners of the chariot, and one thing he didn't describe is the one on the throne.

Why? Because God was not in the habit of making himself visible for fear of the temptation of making images of him. If John had described in detail what the one on the throne looked like, Christian art throughout history would have had, you know, graphic portrayals of God, which is forbidden. Now, I mean, when you think about it, there is a graphic picture of Jesus, but it's symbolic, and yet even the symbolic pictures have inspired art.

Christians and Jews, probably before Christians, could not resist the temptation to sculpt and to draw images of the things in heaven, although the second commandment is you shall make no graven image of anything in heaven or on earth or under the earth to bow down and worship it. When God told Israel that when they saw the cloud and everything on the Mount Sinai, you saw no image. You saw no shape or form.

Just remember that. You can't make an image of me because you don't know what I look like. And so there's no description of the one on the throne, except that he was apparently either glistening or transparent or something like gemstone somehow.

He doesn't even mention him having a human shape, although since he's on a throne and he has a hand, as we shall see in chapter five, he probably had a human shape in general. It says around the throne were 24 thrones. We saw the 24 elders described.

And of course, who are they? And who are the four living creatures? We have descriptions of both of them, and yet they remain very mysterious even to commentators. Many people think that 24 elders are the 12 patriarchs, that is, Jacob's 12 sons who gave rise to the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles. And yet one of the 12 apostles was separately viewing them, John.

And so if indeed he was looking at the 12 apostles, he was looking at himself in one of those thrones. He doesn't indicate he recognized himself or any of the others. They were just elders.

Elders are rulers, and they were on thrones. And they had crowns of gold on their head, too. So they had the trappings of kings, but they also had white robes.

And later we will see the elders burn incense. They have incense censors later on, and we shall see that. So in others they do what priests do.

They have kingly functions, sitting on thrones, wearing crowns, and yet they are like priests wearing the long white robes and burning incense as it was done by the priests in the temple. So they are priestly and they are kingly, whoever they may be. Some say that the number 24 is taken from the fact that David divided the priesthood in his day into 24 courses, because there were too many priests to serve simultaneously all at the tabernacle.

He divided up their duties into two extents year-round, and there were 24 groups of them. And that is possible. These elders do have priestly functions, and the number 24 does call to mind the 24 orders of priests that David divided into.

But I think probably we're to understand these 24 elders to simply represent God's people. And God had people before Christ came and after in the Old Testament and the New. And the people of God were divided into the 12 tribes in the Old Testament and are represented by the 12 apostles in the New.

And while I don't think that John was seeing the 12 apostles and the 12 patriarchs, I think the number 24 suggests the combination of Old Testament and New Testament saints. That is, these elders probably aren't real people at all. They're a vision.

They're symbolic. I don't really expect to see 24 thrones around the throne of God if I go to heaven. Now I could be wrong.

What I expect isn't authoritative. But as I understand the nature of a vision in the Bible, whether it's Daniel, whether it's Zechariah, whether it's Ezekiel, whether it's John on Patmos, the nature of visions is that things, almost everything in the vision represents something and conveys a concept. And therefore the number 24 persons who seem to be kingly and priestly would suggest God's people.

We are a kingdom of priests. This was true of Israel in the Old Testament when they were faithful. And it's true of the church in the New Testament.

And therefore 12 elders representing the Old Testament saints, 12 elders representing the New Testament saints is what frankly most commentators have come up with on this. And I think that I've not been able to really imagine an alternative that makes better sense to me given the overall message of the vision as I understand it. And we'll see that they are praising God.

The people of God do praise Him. He receives glory from His people, both those who He saved in the Old Testament and in the New. We will find in chapter 15 that these inhabitants of heaven are singing what is called the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

Revelation 15.3, these people were up in heaven singing around the throne and it says they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. And it gives a sample of their singing there. Now the song of Moses, of course, is the song of the Old Testament redeemed people who came through the Red Sea.

They sang what was called in Exodus 15 the song of Moses. But this is the song of Moses coupled with the song of the Lamb. You've got the saved of the Old Testament and the redeemed of the New Testament singing together here.

And therefore, again, the singing of the 24 elders probably is the same as the singing of these people in chapter 15. They are representative of all the people God has saved at all times, Old and New Testament. They are not necessarily all in heaven.

You see, those who believe that the pre-trib rapture occurred in chapter 4 verse 1 often say, well, see, the church is in heaven here. They say the 24 elders represents the church and it's in heaven. So the church must have been raptured.

Well, I assure you much of the church is in heaven. In fact, as we speak, they say, well, Jesus, in order to come back with 10,000 of his saints, he'll have to rapture the church first so that he has to come for the saints before he can come with the saints. Not so.

There are 10,000 of his saints with him in heaven right now. He can bring with him any moment he wishes. It does not require that he rapture us first.

He can bring the tens of thousands who are with him now. John is caught up in heaven. He sees the people of God.

Now, I'm not even positive that we're to understand that he's conveying the idea that these people of God are specifically in heaven. He's in the spirit, seeing spiritual things. And therefore, the worship of the people of God might represent the people of God no matter where they are.

Certainly many of them have gone on to heaven. Some of them are still here. But the worship of the saints is, I believe, represented by these people.

And no doubt, since the venue is heaven around the throne, it's primarily conveying the idea of saints who've gone to heaven. But he says, after he describes the 24 elders, it says in verse 5, from the throne proceed lightning, thunderings, and voices. Now, we're going to see a lot of lightning, thunderings, and voices in the book of Revelation.

In fact, every time they're mentioned together, he seems to add something more. Lightning, thunderings, voices, and an earthquake. Then lightning, thunderings, voices, an earthquake, and great hail.

These things are going to accumulate. But the main thing is they're proceeding from the

throne. And they are judgment images.

The idea here is whatever judgment we're about to read of is not random at all. It is proceeding from the wise judge who is himself sentencing and sending forth and executing these judgments against people who deserve them. We'll have more to say about that in a moment.

Now, there were also seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. Now, we encountered the seven spirits of God the first time in chapter 1. And it was not all that helpful. But it said, in trying to understand who they are, in chapter 1, verse 4, it says, John to the seven churches which are in Asia, grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ.

So I suggested that many believe this is the Trinity. The first person mentioned, he that is, was, and is to come, being the Father, Jesus Christ playing himself. And then the seven spirits of God representing the Holy Spirit.

I say that because the commentators say that. I also said I'm not at all convinced that this is a very satisfying explanation of who the seven spirits of God are. I just know of no other alternative that has ever been suggested that that makes more sense.

Not to say that makes a lot of sense. Who the seven spirits of God are, are something of a mystery. To say that they represent the Holy Spirit solves a mystery in a way.

Whether it solves it satisfactorily or not will be anyone's judgment. But we encountered them in chapter 1, verse 4, without any explanation who they were. Then in chapter 3, verse 1, we encountered them again in Jesus' statement.

These things says he who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. So here he associates the seven spirits of God with the seven stars in some way. You remember the seven stars were the seven angels of the seven churches.

What John saw that was explained at the end of chapter 1 in verse 20 was, what are the seven stars? What are the seven lamps? Well, the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches. The seven lamps are the seven churches. So we see in chapter 3, verse 1, the seven spirits of God are somehow associated with the seven stars.

But here in chapter 4, they are associated with the seven lamps. In fact, identified with them. Chapter 4, verse 5, there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.

In chapter 1, the seven lamps were the seven churches. Of course, there are seven lamp stands, but presumably each lamp stand had a lamp on it. Now, whether this is saying that the churches are bearing their light under the supervision of God before the throne of God or whatever, I'm not sure.

But what's mysterious is that it says that these lamps are the seven spirits of God. So the mystery thickens. And we're going to hear about them one more time.

And it's not going to help. We will see them mentioned again in chapter 5 and verse 6, where at the end of that verse, the middle of the verse says, there stood a lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. So now, what are the seven spirits of God? Well, they are the seven eyes and they are the seven lamps.

And they're somehow associated with the seven stars and also associated with Jesus and the Father in the greeting at the beginning of the book. And when you can put all those clues together and tell me what the common denominator is, we will know what the seven spirits really are. Those are all the verses we have that mention them.

So I think I have learned to be very content with what few things I can understand and realize there are going to be a great number of things probably that I cannot. But one thing I can understand, I think, as we move along and compare scripture to scripture, is the movement of the plot of this story. And that's what I'm going to try to share with you.

Now verse 6, chapter 4, verse 6, before the throne there was a sea of glass like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, by the way, sea of glass, that means it's very calm. The sea is sometimes very turbulent.

At this point, there's a calm. The sea is going to be stirred up. In chapter 7 it says, in verse 1, chapter 7, after these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth holding the four winds of the earth that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.

That is, no turbulence will be allowed to go at this point because something has to be done first. In that case, it's the sealing of the servants of God on their forehead. It has to happen before any turbulence, before there's any judgment.

The sea is going to be blown around. The sea is going to be stirred up along with trees and other things. But right now he sees calm, a sea of glass.

Now there's thunderings and lightnings proceeding from the throne, but they are not yet messing things up. The sea is still calm. The judgments have not really been unleashed.

It says in verse 6, and in the midst of the throne and around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. Now, where are they? They're in the midst of the throne and around the throne. Okay, what would be in the midst of the throne? I mean, picture a throne, and there's already someone seated there.

So where are the living creatures going to be in the midst of the throne? Maybe the throne is like a complex, a whole stage area they're in. I don't know. But they're not in the midst of the

throne only.

They're also around the throne. Now there's only four of them. They've got to be positioned in some way that he says are in the midst of and around the throne.

I cannot picture it, and I don't feel the need to do so. All I can say is I think these these details are impressionistic, and I think they're trying to convey ideas. What are the ideas? What are the four living creatures? Well, probably their description could help us out.

Do you think? I don't know. Let's see. They were full of eyes in front and in back, so they're real hard to sneak up on.

The first living creature was like a lion. The second living creature like a calf. The third living creature had a face of a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle, and they had six wings each, and they were full of eyes around and within.

Apparently, they were introspective as well as outward looking. Their eyes were around them, but also within them, and they do not rest day or night, and they sing. Okay, so that should be enough clues to go on.

What kind of creatures are these? Well, easily, one's a lion, one's an ox, one's man-like, one's an eagle, but what do they represent? This imagery is certainly taken from a combination of Old Testament passages, as much of Revelation's pictures are, combining images from more than one place. In Ezekiel chapter one and in Ezekiel chapter 10, twice, Ezekiel gives detailed descriptions of creatures that he identifies as the cherubim. Now, he does not use the word cherubim in Ezekiel chapter one.

He just describes them as creatures, but in chapter 10, he gives the exact same description. He sees them again, and he says, these are the cherubim. So, we now know that what Ezekiel saw were cherubim.

Were they these creatures? Well, not exactly, but they seem to be relatives, because the same four creatures that we find represented here were represented in the cherubim. The only difference is, here we have one creature like a lion, one like an ox or a calf, one like a man, one like an eagle. The cherubim that Ezekiel saw were also four creatures in number.

They were the four corners of the chariot, like footmen, around God's throne chariot, but each of them had four faces. Each of the cherubim had a face of a lion, each had a face of an ox, each had the face of a man, each had the face of an eagle. So, in other words, there were 16 faces among them.

As near as we can tell, these living creatures only have the four. They're the same animals, the same faces, but distributed somewhat differently. Furthermore, the cherubim that Ezekiel saw had four wings.

It's distinctly stated they had four wings. This says these creatures, in verse six, or verse eight, excuse me, have six wings. Now, in having six wings, they resemble more the seraphim, the burning ones that Isaiah saw in Isaiah 6, when he saw the Lord high and lifted up with his train filling the temple.

It was the seraphim that were there singing, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Hey, that's what these are singing. That's the song these guys are singing.

They're singing the seraph song, and they have six wings. The seraphs had six wings. Now, are these seraphs then, or are they cherubs? It is possible that the seraphs fit this description completely, and the cherubim are sort of like them in having similar faces, but my impression is that this symbolic vision is borrowing images from both the cherubim and the seraphim.

We could, of course, assume that the cherubim are real creatures that fit the description that Ezekiel gives, and actually live in heaven, and the seraphim are also living creatures that live in heaven. These are like some kind of a hybrid, like there's been some intermixing up there. The angels aren't married or given in marriage, but there's some transitional forms in between them.

There's these four living creatures. I don't think that's the way we're supposed to look at it. I think that the cherubim described by Ezekiel, the seraphim described by Isaiah, and these creatures are all symbolic descriptions rather than literal, and this shouldn't bother us.

Once you become familiar with Ezekiel, especially, and other books like it, like Zechariah, you'll find that this is not an unusual thing to say. Every vision that Zechariah saw or Ezekiel saw was full of stuff that was really not what it appeared to be. Eagles representing kings of Judah, an olive tree or some kind of a cedar tree representing the Messiah, the king of Tyre called a cherub, the king of Assyria being called a cedar in Lebanon.

Ezekiel, Zechariah, these visions, in Zechariah, Joshua and Zerubbel are called two olive trees, and they are represented as having golden pipes running from them into golden bowls feeding a lampstand, and they are these two guys. In other words, in apocalyptic visions, things are not what they appear to be. What is presented is a representation of an idea that corresponds to something, and therefore, a description of the cherubs or of the seraphs or of these creatures probably corresponds to certain ideas that we're supposed to get across here.

I'm going to assume this true based on my familiarity with the other similar types of visions in the Old Testament. And what then do they represent? Although the faces are distributed differently here than in Ezekiel, the same four faces are in both places. You've got a lion, you've got an ox, you've got a man, you've got an eagle.

And what do those represent? The rabbis had a theory about this, of course not about Revelation, but about the faces in Ezekiel, which are represented here in Revelation also. The rabbis contemplating the cherubim of Ezekiel said, well, the lion is the chief of the wild beasts.

The ox is the chief of the domesticated beasts.

The eagle is clearly the chief of the birds, and man is the chief of all creation. So that the lion, the ox, the birds, and man simply encompass representations, the chief representations, of all of the created realm, all the beings that God created. Just as when Moses needed to negotiate with the 12 tribes of Israel, he called the chiefs, he called the leaders, the princes, the elders of the tribes, the older men who negotiated for the tribes.

The tribes were represented in their chiefs. And so all the realms of creation, the wild animals, the domestic animals, the birds, all creation itself, represented in their chiefs, in these visions. The idea being that these four living creatures represent the creation.

And what do we find them doing? Praising God. The heavens declare the glory of God. The creation is speaking his praises, as are the redeemed people.

In this vision, God is being praised by those people that he's redeemed and his creation, the two sources from which God receives praise. And one reason, among others, for suspecting that we're not looking at a literal picture is that it says that these living creatures do not cease, they do not rest, day or night, they don't stop singing this song. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, who was and is and is to come.

Now it's a very lofty song, it's a very edifying song, but it doesn't have, I mean, it has some good theology in it, but day and night, forever and ever, they just sing these three lines and nothing else. Maybe, but what makes it seem less likely that this is literal is that it says in verse 9, whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, whenever they do, but they do it 24-7, but whenever they do it, well, whenever they, what do you mean, when do they ever stop doing it? They do it ceaselessly, day and night, but whenever they sing this song, the elders respond by casting their crowns on the, in front of the throne. Now, does this mean the elders are continually throwing their crowns off because the living creatures are continually singing? Whenever the living creatures sing this song, they take their crowns off.

Well, then do they put them back on and throw them off and how's this work? How are we supposed to picture this? I don't know that we are supposed to picture it. I think we're basically supposed to be absorbing it, not so much picturing it, but digesting it more like. The idea here is that the elders, of course, are casting their crowns before the Lord as if to say, whatever achievements we have gained are not really our achievements, but yours, whatever rewards we have earned, we have earned through your strength, through your enablement, through your grace.

Therefore, these rewards belong to you. At least the action of casting the crowns down before the throne would convey that idea. And I think this vision is more interested in conveying ideas than giving us some kind of a literal description of what's really going on in the sky right now, or was even literally going on in the a picture story that gives him some idea of heavenly

realities, but not in their literal descriptive form, I think.

And we find that the elders are singing this song in verse 11, you are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things. And by your will, they exist and are created or were created. So they are acknowledging God as the creator of everything and indicating his prerogatives.

Since everything was made at his behest, everything was made for his purpose, at his will, everything was made as the King James says, for your pleasure. The King James says, for thy pleasure they are and were created. God had an idea that would please him.

And he made everything for that idea. Of course, this suggests that the creation does not have any purpose of existence other than to please God and to fulfill his purpose. That means that we who are part of that creation have no reason to exist except to fulfill the purpose of God.

We sometimes imagine that we have purpose. And you know, when you talk to an atheist or read an atheist, they really do not have any good answer to the question, well, then what is the purpose of existence? They have to, if they're honest, say, well, there really is no purpose. But if they're not quite honest and not willing to go that far, they'd say, well, you can, every person has to decide for himself what purpose, what's the purpose of his existence.

My purpose is to make the world a better place. My purpose is to alleviate poverty. My purpose is to do these good things or whatever.

But who assigned that purpose? You did? Well, then it has no intrinsic validity. You're just pretending that you have a purpose because we're asking what purpose was there for you existing? You didn't come into existence by your own will to fulfill your purpose. You have decided for yourself on something you wanted to do once you were here and decided that's going to be my purpose from now on.

But what was the purpose of you being here in the first place? And you couldn't have chosen that. And very few people are going to let their parents choose their life purposes for them. So who purposed you being here? If there's no God, no one did.

If there's no God, there's no purpose in living. And it's not too surprising that nihilism has become such as a classic mindset of a generation or two that have been raised being taught that they weren't created by God. They just arrived the same way every other animal species did through a process that nature mindlessly worked and brought about things that nature never intended to be here.

It's just nature produced them blindly, mindlessly. There's no more reason for you to be here than there is for a rock to be in the ground. There's no reason for anything to be here.

It just is. It just happened. But of course, if you think that, then there really is nothing transcendent about being human at all.

You can't fulfill your purpose in life because there really isn't one. You can pretend there is. You can imagine there is.

You can hope there is. You can define a purpose of your own and say, that's my purpose. But you have to live with the knowledge that I'm just saying that's my purpose.

I really don't know why I was born. I think I wasn't born for anything. I was just born for nothing.

And I've got to, in order to find satisfaction, pretend that there's something I'm here for. Something that was supposed to happen. I was supposed to fill a place in this puzzle.

Something that had to be done. And I was the one for the job. Now see, if God made us, all those intuitions are true.

Everyone believes there's a purpose for their existence. Or if they don't, they're kind of ready for a padded cell. Because you really can't live as a human being without a sense of direction.

A sense of there's a reason I should go this way and not this way because it's my purpose to do that. One philosopher, I don't remember if he was a Christian or not. He probably was a Christian, but he was a philosopher, not a theologian.

He's quoted as saying, according to evolution, the universe purposely produced creatures that are obsessed with finding their purpose. But there is no purpose for them. And it would be very strange for this obsession with believing there's a purpose, but there isn't, to somehow have selective advantage.

Why would it be that creatures who are deluded about reality and think there's something transcendent when there isn't, why would that be predictive of selective advantage? Why would evolution produce this kind of creature? These people are like ostriches with their head in the ground if it's not true. They're pretending that the universe is a different way than it is if it's not true. It's hard to imagine how evolution, if it's picking the fittest and the wisest and the best, why it would select a whole race to be the dominant race who believe something about the universe that isn't true and something about themselves that isn't true, namely that somebody made them for something.

And someone did. And that's what these 24 elders are declaring. God is worthy to receive every glory and honor and power because he created all things and he did it for a purpose.

They exist by his will. Now it's important to note the ramifications. Because God created, he is worthy.

His creatorship translates into his being worthy, that is deserving of something, to be glorified, to be honored. That people are told to honor and glorify God because he deserves it. And therefore, if people choose not to honor and glorify God, they are depriving God of something

he deserves.

Just like if you hire someone to do some work in your yard and they deserve to be paid and you just send them home without money. You say, sorry, you're not going to get the money. You rip them off.

If somebody deserves something from you and you don't give it to him, you're a thief. To say he's worthy to receive means he deserves this. Why? Because he created it and he has the right to expect from his creation the things that he made it for.

You know, this concept that the creator has the right to his products is intuitive in every legal system in modern thinking civilization. That's why we have copyright laws. That's why we have patents.

Because if you are the creator of something, it is intuitively known, well, you ought to have the right to do with it what you want. You get the patent on it. You get to control its production.

You get the copyright. You get the royalties for it. Why? Because you made it, of course.

Why should anyone else get that? The thing you make doesn't have intrinsic rights to anything but the person who made it does. And so God is worthy to receive what he wants from his creation. And nobody has the right to deprive him.

Now, people do have the power to. God gave us free choice. And sometimes people get confused about that.

Well, if God gave us free choice, why is he going to judge us for anything? Free choice means you can make the wrong decisions. It doesn't mean you can get away with it. Free choice doesn't mean God said all choices are equally good, all choices are equally valid.

It just means that there's a right choice and a wrong choice and he lets you make the choice which you'll have. But the wrong choice comes with consequences. And so we have the choice to glorify God or do something else with our lives.

According to the elders' song, we have, in a sense, the power to make that choice but not the right. We don't have the right to deprive God of anything. And therefore, anyone who lives one moment of his life without consciously being devoted to serving and glorifying God is, at that moment, robbing God of what is owed to him, what he's worthy to receive.

Now, chapter 5 then continues the vision without a break but adding some new details. We already saw there was one on the throne and he was surrounded by a group of unusual throne attendants, the 24 elders and the four living creatures. We're going to be introduced to millions of angels in this part of the vision, but before we do, there's some important action to take place.

There's no forward movement of the story in chapter 4. There's simply a description of what's

continually going on in heaven in John's vision. But now there's a plot, now there's action, now there's development. And I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals? And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look at it. So I wept much because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, do not weep.

Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seals. And I looked and behold, in the midst of the throne, there's a lot of things in the midst of the throne, the living creatures are there too, as well as the inhabitant, but in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders stood a lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. Then he came and took the scroll out of the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

Now, if you wanted to get any sleep, that was the wrong thing to see happen because as soon as that happened, everything in heaven got noisy. Things, everyone berserk. This was considered to be an occasion for celebration when the lamb stepped forward and take this scroll.

It says, now when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song saying, you are worthy to take the scroll to open its seals for you were slain and have redeemed us to God by your blood. The Alexandria, Texas has redeemed men to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation and have made us again, the Alexandria, Texas men, kings and priests to our God.

And we or they in the Alexandria shall reign on the earth. I mentioned the way in the day, because the way suggests that the singers are the redeemed ones from every tribe and tongue. And as that would identify them certainly as the church.

If we are redeemed from every tribe and tongue and have become a kingdom of priests, this is the church. And if it's the singers themselves, then we've easily identified them. Unfortunately, the older manuscripts don't say we, but they.

So whoever it is singing is singing about the church. Whether they are the church or not is not so easy to decide from the pronouns. Then I looked and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, the living creatures and the elders.

And the number of them was 10,000 times, 10,000 and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing. Just coincidentally, there are seven things in that

list and every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea and all that are in them. I heard saying blessing and honor and glory and power to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb forever and ever.

Then the four living creatures said, amen. And the 24 elders fell down and worshiped him who lives forever and ever. Okay.

Now what have we just read about? Well, the last half of the chapter is simply the celebration. The action takes place in the first half of the chapter and then we find how important that action was by the fact that first the living creatures and the 24 elders start singing and then they're joined by the voice of many angels. And the number of the angels was 10,000 times 10,000 and thousands of thousands.

So there's millions of them. And then in verse 13, every creature which is in heaven and earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea all join in. So this is a rising crescendo with more and more voices being added until every created creature in the universe is now singing this song.

Now the fact that it says every creature in heaven and earth and under the sea and so forth, all the fish and all that are singing again conveys the idea of a symbolic picture, but conveying the idea that all of creation and all of the inhabitants of heaven are excited about what we've just seen. So it is kind of interesting, but what is so exciting about it? You've got this scroll, it's got seven seals on it. Now a seal was made of wax with the mark of a signet ring.

They're not hard to break. When it says in verse 3, no one in heaven or earth or under the sea or the earth, excuse me, was able to open it, when it says they weren't able to open it and break the seals, the problem was not that they didn't have the strength. Anyone would have the strength to break a wax seal.

The issue is who is worthy or authorized. That's the question that's asked in verse 2. Who is worthy to open the scroll and loose its seals? The issue here is not strength, but qualification. The scroll has got to be opened, but only a qualified person can break the seals, like any official document.

An official document in those days would be sealed shut and would have to be opened by someone qualified to break the seals. Not everyone was allowed to do it. Anyone could do it if it came to brute force, but being permitted to legally would be another issue.

So what is this scroll? Well, that's a matter of opinion, of course, as are most things in the book of Revelation. But the common view of the futurist, and I believe of some of the other views as well, is that it is the title deed to the earth. And as it is understood by the futurists especially, this is the deed that was surrendered by Adam to Satan.

God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth, but when they sinned, they came under the dominion of Satan. It's as if the rule of the world was delivered over to Satan. But God always

intended to get it back, and Jesus is the one who paid the price to get it back.

This is how the story goes. Now to tell you the truth, that scenario I just gave, I have no objection to it. As near as I can tell, that's one very reasonable way to summarize the biblical story.

But they take it from there and say, so this is the end of the world when Jesus is finally taking the world back. He's going to take the world back and reign for a thousand years on it, and then he's going to make a new heaven and a new earth. But first he has to reclaim it, and that requires opening this scroll.

Now this scroll is going to be a judgment on the devil and all who are on his side, so that they will no longer be able to have control or ownership. So Jesus in a sense is seen as taking the title deed of the earth back to own it. Now there's nothing unedifying about that particular scenario.

It's one of several that could be imagined. I happen to favor another. I personally think that Jesus appears here for another function.

I believe the scroll has a different function. In my opinion, John has been caught up into a throne room where a trial has been underway, and John missed the trial, but he got there in time for the sentencing. He got there just in time to see the sentence being handed down, the judgment on the criminal.

The criminal is described in many ways in the book of revelations, sometimes as a harlot who's drunk with the blood of the martyrs. Well, who's the plaintiff in this case? The martyrs themselves. We get this hint when the scroll is being opened and the fifth seal is broken, and in chapter 6 we read in verse 9, chapter 6 verse 9 and following says, when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.

And they cried with a loud voice saying, how long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth or land. We'll have to decide between earth or land momentarily. And white robe was given to each of them, and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who would be killed as they were was completed.

Now, here's the plaintiffs. They're crying out to God saying, when are you going to avenge? Aren't you the judge? Didn't you say, vengeance is mine, I will repay. Didn't you tell us not to avenge ourselves so that you could do that for us? When are you going to do that? When are you going to judge and avenge those who shed our blood, those who killed us? There's some injustice done here.

Just as the blood of Abel cried out from the ground at the injustice of his murder so that God had to address the murderer Cain, so the blood of the martyrs or the souls of the martyrs

who've been slain is crying out saying, hey, when are you going to avenge our blood? This is not the kind of thing that a good judge can leave unfinished. How long will it be? So I believe we have a picture of an unredressed injustice. However, it's about to be redressed.

When the story ends, when you get to really the end of the judgment portion, you're in chapter 19 or actually back in verse 18 and the transition to verse 19, it says in verse 21, Revelation 18, 21. Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea saying, thus with violence, the great Babylon shall be thrown down and shall not be found anymore. Then it goes on and then it says in verse 24, and in her, that is in Babylon, was found the blood of prophets and saints and of all who were slain on the earth.

That must be the culprit that the martyrs are complaining about. When are you going to avenge us on those who killed us? But here, Babylon is the one who is, in her, has found all the blood of the prophets and the saints who were slain on the earth and therefore she is judged. She's thrown into the sea like a millstone.

And in verse 19, after these things, I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, hallelujah, salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God, for true and righteous are his judgments. He's finally avenged. The judgment, the sentence has been executed because he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication.

He has avenged on her the blood of his servants shed by her. So the martyrs are complaining, how long before you avenge our blood? Well, that's exactly what's going to be taking place here. There's been a trial.

The plaintiff has brought the complaint. These people killed us and therefore the judge is handing down the sentence. As the seals are individually broken off the scroll, the judgment unfurls.

The judgment develops and the rest of the book of Revelation, I believe, is intended to be seen as the verdict of the judge and the sentence of the judge being passed down and executed. But the question first is who is worthy to execute the harlot? The question seems to be the same as that which Jesus raised when a harlot was brought to him in John chapter 8. He said, let him who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her. She surely deserves to die because Moses said that she should be stoned to death.

Jesus didn't question whether she should die or not. He said, let the one who's worthy, let the one who is not as guilty as she is be the first to hurl the stone. Of course, only one person was present who was worthy to do that, to execute the harlot, and he on that occasion said, I don't choose to do that right now.

Just don't go and sin anymore. But here's a case of a harlot who needs to be executed and she's guilty of the blood of the saints and the martyrs. And the saints and martyrs are raising their complaint before God night and day saying, when is this going to happen? And so God is

responding.

He's handing down the sentence. Apparently when John was caught up there into the courtroom, all testimony and evidence had been presented. And it's now left to the judge to hand down the sentence.

And so he's got it in his hand and now he's looking for an executioner who's qualified. It has to be someone who's without sin. And therefore it's very difficult to find somebody who's qualified.

He says in verse two, I saw a strong angel proclaim with a loud voice, a strong angel, a loud voice. Why? Because this message had to go through the whole universe, had to be heard far and wide saying, who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals? And the answer was no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to respond to that summons. They weren't even able to look at it.

I think that's why John wept. He was curious. Shoot, I was hoping to get a look at that thing.

So I wept much because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll. Actually, I'm kind of facetious when I said he was just curious and disappointed. I think he got a sense, perhaps before we do, of the import of this particular scroll.

We are not really given enough information yet by chapter five, verse three, to know exactly what the issue is here with this scroll. But John apparently realizes this is not something that can go unopened. And he's weeping convulsively when he finds that it looks like no one's going to show up to do it.

Now, what does it take to qualify? Now, it turns out that Jesus is the only one who qualifies. So we might think, well, he has to be sinless. Let him who is without sin cast the first stone at her.

True, no doubt he does have to be sinless, but there are sinless angels too. Why didn't they qualify? Heaven's got millions of them. Why couldn't any of them break it? Well, probably the fact that Jesus was human had something to do with qualifying him too.

The fact that he had been in our shoes and could then be, as it were, qualified to judge in a sense sympathetically and justly. If you look at John chapter five, also written by the same author as who wrote Revelation, obviously, John 5, 22, for the father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the son. That all should honor the son just as they honor the father.

He who does not honor the son does not honor the father who sent him. And then it says in verse 27 that God has given him, Jesus, authority to execute judgment also. Why? Because he's the son of man.

He's sinless and so are angels, but he's not an angel. He's a man. And that is why God has given him the authority to exercise all judgment.

Why is that an issue? I remember when I was young hearing preachers sometimes tell a story. It was fiction, but it was illustrative about how all the people are rounded up on the day of judgment. They're sitting in the outer room of the courtroom waiting to go before the judge behind the big double doors that are shut there, and they're waiting for their day in court, and they're all talking to each other about how God has no right to judge them.

Because each one tells this story. There was a stigma in my life from the time I was born, because I was in poverty, and I was born out of wedlock, and I was born to a hated race, persecuted. I was subject of racial prejudice and all these different problems.

I was betrayed by my friends and all that stuff, of course. And you know where this is going. And each one tells this story and says, God has no right to judge me.

He's been here in his ivory tower all this time, unaffected by all the temptations and pains of living in the world we lived in. How could he possibly pass righteous judgment on us? And then they came up with the idea, we should actually put a list of demands to God that before he can judge us, he would have to go through this, this, and this. And they make the list, of course, that resembles the list of what they said were their exemptions.

Until God goes through that, he cannot judge us. And then the angel comes out and opens the door and says, okay, court is in session. Come in.

And they look and see who's sitting on the bench, and they realize God has served his term already. And he is qualified to judge them, because of course, he was the son of man. He is the one who has been through what men have been through.

Not every last thing, but the Bible does say he was tempted at all points as we are, yet without sin, he's had to struggle. Someone said that when Jesus went back to heaven, I think the first thing he said was, man, those guys have it really hard down there. You know, he's not a high priest who is untouched by the feeling of our infirmities.

He's been encompassed with infirmity himself. And therefore, he is qualified to judge. He knows how hard it is for us, because it was hard for him.

Harder for him, because he didn't succumb to temptation. It's a lot easier on the people who succumb than those who hold out, because succumbing is the easy way out. The person who never succumbs temptation is doing the much more difficult thing, of course.

And so he has been through as much as we have, only harder. And he's without sin. And he is in all points qualified as no other being in the universe is.

The only man who's been in our skin and who didn't sin. So initially, no one shows up. The summons goes through heaven.

No angels qualify. Through earth, no men qualify. Under the earth, anyone down there? No, no

one qualifies.

And so John says, uh-oh, looks like this story's over. Guess I'll go home to Patmos now, because I'm not going to see any more action here. Because no one's here to open this scroll.

And obviously, that's supposed to happen. But verse 5 says, one of the elders said to me, do not weep. Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.

Now, the lion of the tribe of Judah is a term not used anywhere else in scripture. Although, a lion traditionally was the emblem of the tribe of Judah. When the tribes marched through the wilderness on their way to Canaan, and the order of their encampments and marching order are given in the book of Numbers, there were banners of each of the tribes.

And although the Bible doesn't say what was on the banners, according to Jewish tradition, Judah's banner was a lion. Interestingly, the other major tribes on the other sides of the tabernacle were an ox, a man, and an eagle. But that's neither here nor there.

That's Jewish tradition. But Judah is associated with a lion. In fact, when Jacob prophesied over his 12 sons, when he came to Judah, he likened him to a lion.

In Genesis chapter 49, prophesying about Judah, it says in verse 9, Genesis 49, 9, Judah is a lion's whelp. From the prey, my son, you've gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion.

And as a lion, who shall rouse him? Then it says, the scepter shall not depart from Judah. That is the royal authority. The emblem of being king is the scepter.

It will not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh comes. Shiloh is a word that means him to whom belongs. Him to whom the scepter belongs will not come from anywhere except Judah.

And Judah will keep the scepter in hand through the house of David until Shiloh, the one to whom it belongs, comes. This is the prophecy. But he likens Judah to a lion.

And so also Jesus is called the lion of the tribe of Judah. Now what John is told is that the lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed. But he doesn't say what he's prevailed over, but he's won the battle.

Jesus said the same thing in the upper room, but he said, I have overcome, same word, I've overcome the world. And obviously the churches who are receiving this communique, this book of Revelation are also urged to be overcomers. Jesus has overcome.

He's like a lion. So obviously John expects to look up and see a lion. He's been weeping.

His eyes are blurred. He looks up to see what has been described. And what has been described or alluded to is a lion, a prevailing lion, obviously a ferocious lion.

And he looks up and he sees what appears to be the opposite. I looked and behold in the midst of the throne and in the four living creatures, there stood a lamb, and not just a lamb, but one that's been killed. I mean, if a lamb isn't unintimidating enough, just being there as a lamb, it's even less intimidating when it's dead.

It's been slain. And it had seven eyes and seven horns. Now I've mentioned before, horns throughout scripture are emblems of power, seven of perfection.

It means that Jesus is all powerful. He is omnipotent. Seven eyes obviously speaks of being aware of things, seeing things and knowing things.

So having seven eyes means he knows, he sees and knows everything. In fact, it says his seven eyes are the seven spirits sent out into all the earth. I don't know, again, who the seven spirits really are, how to describe them.

But it's clear that it says his eyes are sent out into all the earth. The seven spirits are his eyes. And therefore, he's drawing information directly through direct knowledge.

Like when you see something from all over the world, he's paying attention to everything. Now, I find it interesting that those who are acclimated to the rare climes of heaven and see things through heavenly eyes, when they see Jesus, he's a lion. John, who's a mere man, looking at the same object, sees a lamb.

Jesus, the same being. From one perspective of a lion, that's how the inhabitants of heaven recognize him and see him. To a man, a lamb.

When Jesus was on earth, to the eyes of men, he was not really very scary. He was holy, harmless, separate from sinners, the writer of Hebrews says. Harmless, never heard of flee.

Yeah, he drove a few cows out of the temple once or twice, but he never heard of a person. And he was, in a sense, no one would be afraid that he was going to take up a sword and attack them if they spit in his face. He's harmless.

He's like a lamb. However, the demons, when they saw him, they had a different reaction. Whenever he encountered demon-possessed people, the demons were terrified.

They said, we know who you are. You're the Holy One of God. Have you come to torment us before the time? What have you to do with us? Leave us alone.

Don't cast us into the pit. They obviously saw Jesus differently than people did. People saw Jesus as a harmless lamb.

The demons saw him as an intimidating, fierce foe who could apparently torment them and destroy them. Now, I personally believe that when we come to Revelation 12 and we read of this war in heaven, which ends up with the dragon being cast out of heaven, which is at the cross, I believe, that we are being told that when Jesus was on earth, culminating in the cross,

there was a fierce battle going on in heaven. Michael and his angels fighting against... I wasn't speaking to you, Michael.

Michael and his angels making war against the dragon and his angels. There's this battle going on. It ends at the cross.

So it must have been going on while Jesus was here on earth. If you could have seen into the sky, into the heavenly realm when Jesus was here, you'd see a great battle going on. That's no doubt what the demons saw going on.

They could see that realm. People couldn't. It just looked like Jesus walked around like a harmless peasant, teaching people, feeding hungry people, healing sick people, holding children on his lap, you know, gentle Jesus, meek and mild, and yet in the heavenly realm, there's this horrendous battle going on that ends up with the defeat of Satan, and Jesus sort of hints at that.

When the disciples come back, the 70 come back in Luke 10 from casting out demons, they say, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name. He says, I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven. He saw this violent overthrow of Satan's kingdom going on.

What the disciples saw was this person get delivered a demon, that person get delivered a demon, a few incidental anecdotal victories. Jesus saw the total victory happening. There was this great war and Jesus won it.

He's the lion who prevailed. From the eye of, to the eye of man, he's like a lamb. To the eyes of the inhabitants of heaven, he's much more imposing than that.

And so he came and took the scroll out of the right hand of him who sat on the throne, and that was what, of course, triggered all that happened with this noise in heaven. Now, I'm not going to go into this detail because we've run out of time now, but I do want to just comment on the content of their songs because it's interesting that the first song that was sung in chapter 4 was speaking about how God is worthy because he created all things. The second song, which is in chapter 5, verse 9, talks about how Christ is because he has redeemed mankind.

And therefore, God and Christ together receive praise of a similar sort. They are both proclaimed to be worthy, and of course, both were involved, as we know, in creation and in redemption. It is these two works of God, creation and redemption, which are the things that qualify God to get what he should get.

And for Jesus to do what he must do. Jesus is sovereign and has the right to break those seals and do whatever he needs to to those enemies. God the Father is sovereign and he has the right to do whatever he wants because he made it all.

And so he's praised for his creatorship. He's praised for his redemption of his creatures. And the angels join in the song of verse 11 and 12, saying with a loud voice, worthy is the lamb who

was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.

And just about anything else you might want to add to the list, apparently, because the list is kind of, I think, impressionistic. I don't know that there's a big difference between power and strength, for example, or honor and glory. These are just heaping, heaping accolades, really, upon him.

And then every creature which is in heaven and earth and under the earth, which are under this and in the sea, they all begin saying blessing and honor and glory and power unto him who sits on the throne and unto the lamb forever and ever. And then, you know, when everyone in the universe has been shouting these things out, apparently the song dies down and it ends with the four living creatures saying amen. And the 24 elders fell down and worshipped him who lives forever and ever, which is what they did continually.

And so this picture is of a God who is acknowledged by his creation and by those he's redeemed as worthy to do whatever he wants to do. And he only does the right things. He's a redeemer.

He's a creator. And he now is going to respond to those who are saying, when were you going to avenge us again? Okay, now is when you're going to do it. Here's the sentence.

Here's the one who's going to execute it. This lamb, this lion lamb is going to execute the judgment. Now we have not yet identified who the defendant is against whom this sentence is being handed down.

It is Babylon. We know that because in her was found the blood of the prophets and the apostles and the saints and all that were slain. And that's who's being judged here.

It's a vindication of the martyrs here. But who is Babylon? Now that is something that will have to be discovered from the content of the book itself as we move further into it. But at this point, we don't have time to go further into it.

So we will actually view the breaking of this sixth, at least the first six seals in chapter six. I think we'll probably see in our next session, we'll probably be able, I hope, to take chapter six and seven in saying that I realize I'm probably setting myself up for disappointment, but we will try to do that next time. That will cover all the seven seals, at least if we go up to chapter eight, verse one.

So we'll make that our goal next time. And you can laugh at me tomorrow after the class when I fail to get that far.

OpenTheo

Revelation 6

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In his presentation, Steve Gregg discusses the first six seals of the scroll in Revelation 6, which follow the events that take place in the previous chapter. He notes that the breaking of the seventh seal is postponed, and that the qualifications for breaking the seals are not immediately clear. The chapter also includes Chapter 17 and 18, which feature a lament for Babylon's downfall and the shedding of the blood of prophets and saints on earth.

Transcript

All right, we're going to be turning now to Revelation chapter 6. And this chapter is occupied entirely with the breaking of the first six seals of that scroll, which appeared in chapter 5. And the breaking of the seventh seal will be strangely postponed. In these chapters, we only get the first six. And then where you would expect the seventh seal to be broken, there's an interruption in the continuity.

And chapter 7 intervenes, and then you have the seventh seal being broken in chapter 8, verse 1. But there are seven total, and these seven seals must be broken in order to open the scroll. Now, you remember that chapters 4 and 5 were the opening vision that sort of set up this dramatic moment. Because there was the worship of all the heavenly beings around the throne, praising God for His creative works.

And then there comes a time when this scroll appears in the vision, chapter 5, verse 1. And it is sealed with seven seals. And initially, it looks like nobody's going to qualify to break the seals, so we'll never find out what's in there. But it turns out that Christ comes as the only one.

And heaven and earth and under the earth, no one else is worthy or qualifies to open this document. I suggested that the document is the sentence handed down by a judge. That John has found himself entering a courtroom at the end of the proceedings where testimony has been heard.

The judge has decided to act to vindicate the plaintiff. The plaintiff, I suggested, is represented when we see the fifth seal open, and that is the martyrs. The martyrs whose blood has been shed on the earth are seen there asking how long it may be before they are vindicated, before

they are avenged.

And that is the role of a judge. That's what courtrooms are for, is to avenge wrongs against innocent victims. Now, who is the defendant here? The defendant has not been identified in our lectures yet, nor even in the book of Revelation.

But it will soon be clear that the defendant here, who is condemned and is being sentenced, is the same person who is identified symbolically as Babylon later in the book. Actually, the first time Babylon is mentioned by that name is not until chapter 14. And even then, there's not much.

It's just a passing reference. In chapter 14, in verse 8, we first read of Babylon with these words, Another angel followed saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. So that's the first time we read of Babylon in the book.

Then, in chapter 16, with the pouring out of the seventh bowl, we are told in chapter 16, verse 19, Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and great Babylon was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And then, in chapter 17, we're introduced to Babylon almost as if it's the first time. Although Babylon has been mentioned twice, Babylon has fallen in chapter 14, Babylon receives the cup of wrath in chapter 16.

But now we have Babylon dominating the vision of chapter 17 and 18, where a harlot is seen riding on the beast. And she is, as we see in chapter 17, verse 6, I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. Sounds like this is our culprit here.

At least there's considerable circumstantial evidence she's drunk. And what she's been drinking is the blood of the martyrs. Now, she falls.

She is killed in chapter 17. And in 18, there's mainly a lament, a lengthy lament, that the people who have been sympathetic toward Babylon in the past are lamenting over the downfall of Babylon. And it says in chapter 18, verse 24, And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.

Now, we keep running into this word earth in Revelation, and we shall see that many times, if not every time it occurs, it probably would better be translated as land. Just as is the case, as we've seen, with the Hebrew word eretz in the Old Testament, which could be translated either land or earth. And you really don't have a different word available for either of those words.

If you want to say land, you say eretz in Hebrew. If you want to say earth, you say eretz. So, in Greek, the word ge, in our letters, it would be G-E, ge.

It's gamma eta in Greek, and it means land or earth, just like eretz does in Hebrew. So, you

really have to, the translator has to take his pick. Is this time, is it talking about land or is it talking about earth? Of course, in some cases, land and earth, even in English, are synonyms.

But, like, you know, earth can refer to dirt or something, soil. But, I believe that in most cases, land is going to be the better translation. I believe that the precedent for this in Revelation would be found in Revelation 1, and verse 7, where it says, at the end of verse 7, all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him.

I believe the reference to tribes is something of a giveaway. Tribes of the land would be more suited to the Biblical idea of Israel is divided into tribes. The land is Israel, and all the tribes of Israel, all the tribes of the land.

The land of Israel is divided into tribal units. Now, the earth, the world, is not divided into tribes. It's divided into nations, and therefore, the word tribes is much more closely associated with Israel than with the world in general.

And, I believe that it is, in fact, the tribes of the land. I believe it is Israel that is going to be mourning here. And, there's confirmation of that because if we read Revelation 18, 24, as in her was found the blood of prophets and saints and all who were slain on the land, all those who were slain in Israel, that makes sense because that's where the prophets were.

The blood of the prophets, that's what she's guilty of, as well as saints. Prophets in the Old Testament, saints in the New Testament. The first persecutor of the church was Jerusalem, was the Sanhedrin.

After all, they killed Jesus, or they condemned him to death and blackmailed Pilate. They also stoned Stephen in a mob action. That was the first Christian martyr.

They encouraged Herod, when he had killed James, to also, they encouraged him to arrest Peter with the intention of killing him too. They dispatched Saul of Tarsus to persecute Christians afar and wide, and later dispatched others to follow him up and kill him when he was converted. The first persecutor of the church was not the Romans.

The Romans kind of took over that role to a large degree after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but the early persecutions came from the Jews. In fact, the Jews tried to get the Romans involved. We read in Corinth that Paul's companions were called before Gallop, who was the Roman official in the town.

They tried to persuade him that they were preaching an illegal religion. Illegal because the Roman Empire had a policy that when they conquered a new region, the existing religions could continue to be there. They weren't going to try to wipe out those religions that were indigenous for the morale of their people, no doubt.

They let them continue to worship the gods they worshipped before Rome got there. After all, Rome worshipped many gods. They didn't care how many gods were added.

So, if somebody in a certain region worshipped their own territorial gods, let them continue. The Jews, of course, were worshipping Yahweh before the Romans got there, so Judaism was a permissible religion. It was a legal faith.

Christianity, however, had arisen since the Romans had arrived. It was a new religion, and those were outlawed. Therefore, sometimes the Jews would try to persuade the Roman officials that the Christians were a new and illegal religion.

Eventually, the Romans were persuaded of this, but at first the Romans had a very serious problem seeing this, because they couldn't tell the difference between one monotheist and another. The Jews were monotheists, and until the Christians came along, the Jews were the only monotheists that anyone knew about. None of the other nations were monotheistic.

Only the Jews believed in a single creator god. Then the Christians came along and also believed in that same god. To the Romans, that looked like just a branch of the same religion.

Therefore, Christianity was tolerated until the destruction of Jerusalem. Because when Judaism ended the destruction of Jerusalem, Christianity continued. It became obvious that Christianity had its own identity, separate from Judaism.

It was a different religion, and therefore it was persecuted by the Romans. The first persecutor of the saints and certainly of the prophets was Jerusalem. Jesus makes this very clear.

For example, in Luke chapter 13, when the Pharisees were trying to get Jesus scared about Herod, Jesus was up in Galilee where the Pharisees didn't have that much influence, and they wanted to get him down into Judea where they could get their claws into him. So they started telling him that Herod, the ruler up in Galilee where Jesus was hanging out, was out to get him. Thinking that would perhaps persuade Jesus to go down to where they could get their claws into him, in Judea, down in Jerusalem.

Jesus knew what they were up to, and he said in Luke 13, 32 and 33, He said to them, Meaning Herod. This is a sarcastic remark, of course. There were prophets who perished outside Jerusalem.

There were prophets of the northern kingdom who perished outside Jerusalem. But he's using a hyperbole, more or less, as a sort of a slam on Jerusalem. Yeah, you can't imagine anyone killing the prophets except the people in Jerusalem, their own people.

It can't be that a prophet would perish somewhere else. Jesus, of course, was not speaking technically accurately, but he was making a comment that was so generally true, that it served as a hyperbolic generality. But in Matthew 23, as far as we know, Jesus was not using hyperbole.

When he had been denouncing the scribes and Pharisees, he says in verse 29, Matthew 23, 29. Actually, verse, pardon, yeah, there we go. I'm right.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, you know, the ones who killed the prophets, if we'd been living in those days, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. That is to say, we think our fathers made a mistake in killing the prophets, so we're trying to now posthumously honor the prophets by adorning their tombs and things like that. And, you know, our fathers did this to them, but we wouldn't have done that if we were living back then, is what they say.

But he says, therefore, you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. The very act of calling those murderers your fathers is bearing witness that you are their sons. And to Jesus, you know, like father, like son.

That's why he said, if you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham, over in John chapter 8. He says, you're of your father the devil, you're going to do what he does. He's a murderer, you're going to murder me. So Jesus' implication is, sons behave like their fathers.

You call these murderers your fathers? Well, you're testifying against yourselves that you're their sons and you have their blood running in your veins. He says, fill up then the measure of your father's guilt, that is by killing me. Serpents, brood of vipers, how can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes.

Some of them you'll kill and crucify. Some of them you'll scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come on this generation.

That is, that generation of the Jews in Jerusalem were going to suffer the consequences for their fathers' and their own murderous activities toward God's messengers, the prophets, all the way beginning with Abel and through the last of the prophets to be murdered, Zechariah, and then including the ones that Jesus would send. They're going to kill them too. Now, Jesus clearly is saying, if you want to know who's guilty of the blood of the martyrs, especially the prophets, it can hardly be anyone but Jerusalem.

Now, Babylon in Revelation 18, 24, the blood of the prophets is found on her garments. She's the one who killed the saints and the prophets. Notice in chapter 19, verse 2, in the worship of God, the inhabitants of heaven are saying, true and righteous are God's judgments because he has judged the great harlot, that's Babylon, who corrupted the earth with her fornication and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants shed by her.

At the end of Revelation 18 and 19, he has avenged the blood. And at the beginning in the fifth seal, the martyrs are saying, how long before you avenge our blood? Well, by the end of this chapter, of this book, he's done so. He has avenged the blood.

But who has shed the blood? Well, whoever it is that killed all the prophets and the early martyrs of Christianity, who killed them? Well, obviously, Jerusalem is the culprit. Therefore, it is fair to believe and assume that in this courtroom drama, the Christian martyrs and the prophets who were slain in the Old Testament times as well, the Jewish prophets who were slain, are being vindicated, as Jesus said, all this blood shed and the guilt of that is going to come on this generation. That is Jesus' generation.

That is within 40 years of the time that he said it. He said it in 30 AD. So there can be little doubt who is being judged here and when and why.

The drama is the vindication of innocent martyrs and the person being judged and sentenced is Jerusalem. Now, let's see if we could vindicate that theory from the text itself. I believe we can.

Chapter 6, verse 1. Now, I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a loud voice like thunder, Come and see. Now, by the way, this come and see is the way the Textus Receptus reads four times. The first four seals are broken.

There are four horses. They come out when one of the four living creatures in each case says, Come and see. However, the Alexandrian text simply says, Come.

Now, if it's come and see, apparently the exhortation is to John. Come over here. I want to show you something.

Come and see. If the word is simply come, as the older manuscripts suggest, it would mean that the horses are being invited to come. The seal is broken, and in each case a living creature, of which there's a total of four.

Each one gets a turn to say come, and out comes a horse with a rider. I think it's probable that the Alexandrian text is correct in this. And if so, then what we are seeing is whatever comes is coming by heaven's invitation.

These things are not random events that just happen to occur in the course of the rise and fall of empires. This is something God is directly summonsing. And as we come to each of these, I'm going to go ahead and just read it as come, even though the text we're looking at says come and see.

Verse 2, And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come. And another horse, fiery red, went out, and it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the land.

Or earth, but land is just as good a translation, I think better. And that people should kill one another, and there was given to him a great sword. When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come.

And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and the wine. When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come.

And I looked, and behold, a pale horse, actually a more literal translation would be a green horse. Chloros, as in chlorophyll, in our English word chlorophyll. So chloros means green, a green horse.

And the name of him who sat on it was Death, Thanatos. And Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the land to kill with the sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

Now then we have, of course, the fifth seal, which we've already considered. It's the martyrs complaining and being told, Just be patient. You will be avenged soon, but first there are more martyrs like yourselves that have yet to shed their blood, and then all of you will be vindicated together.

And then we have the sixth seal. We'll get to that separately. And there's reason to, because the first four seals are a cluster.

We can see that they all have something in common that the remaining three seals don't have, and that is that each of the first four has a horse. And it is summoned by one of the four living creatures. It's a good thing there weren't more horses, because we ran out of living creatures.

We'd have to start making the rounds again. But there were four horses, four living creatures, and they are obviously a cluster of events. What do they represent? Well, in many cases we can compare scripture with scripture and get some answers.

Not so much, though, with reference to the first one. Verse 2, I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. The most common interpretation of this among futurists, dispensationalists, is this is the Antichrist.

So, in other words, the church was raptured in chapter 4, verse 1, and the first bit of important action that we see when the seals start getting broken is the appearance of the Antichrist. And he's going out conquering and to conquer. Now, what arguments can be brought forward to support the identification of this as the Antichrist? Nothing comes to mind.

Now, if it's somebody who's one of the characters in the book of Revelation elsewhere, we might think it's Christ, because there is a rider on a white horse in Revelation 19 who is unmistakably Christ. So, one might say this is Christ. It is a possibility.

It is, I suppose, a possibility that it's Antichrist if we're looking at the future, but John said these things must shortly come to pass, and I don't think we're looking at events in the distant future

from John's time. I'd like to suggest that this conqueror on the white horse represents the invading armies of Rome. It could be Vespasian, it could be Titus, or it could just be representative of the conquering power coming and invading in Galilee up in the north.

You see, the Jewish war began in 66 AD when the Zealots rebelled against Rome. Rome simply came in to retaliate, and it happened in Galilee first, but as the battle escalated, of course, it moved throughout the whole country. Eventually, the last point to fall was Masada, but one of the last things to fall and the most significant for the fate of the nation was Jerusalem, and it didn't fall until 70 AD.

But the war began up in Galilee with the invasion, with Roman armies coming in to quell a rebellion of the Zealots, and I believe if we begin with the assumption that this white horse rider represents that conquering power, the Romans coming in, we will make good sense of the rest of the vision. As I said, we don't have much comparison of Scripture to help us with this first horseman. What we do have is the succeeding horseman, and in many cases, we can make sense of them.

Once we do, then the first horseman will fall into sort of the paradigm. So what is the second horseman? When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come, and another horse, fiery red. Red, no doubt, is intended to convey the idea of bloodshed, and the one who is riding on it, according to the end of that verse, had a great sword, and he was taking peace from the earth.

He was granted the power to take peace from the earth. I believe, and frankly, commentators of many different approaches to Revelation believe, that this red horse represents civil war. Although, of course, futurist commentators often think it refers to civil war in the future.

And, you know, historicists believe it's perhaps civil war in the Roman Empire, but preterists, who would take the approach I'm seeing, would see this as civil war or breakdown of civil unity in Israel. And if you read Josephus, who was a participant and witness of the war, he tells us that when the Romans came in and when the war began, the people of Israel eventually were so disorganized and disunified that they began to kill each other. He says every village in Israel became broken into two warring camps.

That is, the Jews in the village were on one side and on the other side killing each other. He says the day was spent in bloodshed, and the night was spent in fear of bloodshed, and there was no peace in the land at all. Not only did the Romans come and, of course, do their harm, but the Jews kind of helped the Romans in killing each other.

This also, by the way, happened later when the city was besieged. The Romans were outside. The walls couldn't get in initially, but they almost didn't have to.

They could have just waited because the Jews inside the city were divided into three warring camps killing each other off. You can see that there was a strange, inconvenient, irrational

breakdown in the unity of the nation itself. Jews against Jews.

Now, when you read the Old Testament about some of the ways that God won battles when Israel was being attacked by overwhelming forces, as in the days of Gideon and his driving out the Midianites with only 300 men, or when Jehoshaphat had an army of a million people attacking him, and he prayed and asked God for a strategy, and God said, send the singers and the musicians out first and let them praise the Lord and the beauty of holiness. And when they did, in the case of Midian in Gideon's day, and also in the case of Jehoshaphat's day, and other times too, sometimes the wars with the Philistines in David's day were like this, it says God set the enemy against themselves, against each other. It's like confusion happened among the enemy, and they didn't know who their enemy was.

Instead of fighting Israel, they fought each other and killed each other off. That's exactly what happened to the Jews themselves when it came time for God to judge them. When the Romans came in, the Jews began to kill each other.

It's kind of crazy. And I believe that chapter 9 will give us some kind of idea of why they became as irrational as they did in this kind of behavior. We're not there yet.

But the point is, as the white horse would represent external armies coming against them, the red horse represents the breakdown of peace within the nation. They're not at peace with each other anymore. Remember Jesus said in Matthew 10, verse 34, I didn't come to bring peace, I came to bring a sword.

This red horse rider has a big sword, and he divides people. Jesus said, I've come to set... Well, let's see how he puts it, because he mentions several different family members. Matthew 10, verse 34 and following, he says, Do not think that I came to bring peace on the land.

I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes will be those of his own household.

This certainly sounds like actually what Josephus described. People in the same village, in the same households, irrationally killing their allies, their family members, people who are their neighbors, instead of joining forces against the common enemy. But there's a great sword that came as a judgment on the nation when they rejected Christ.

In Luke chapter 19, Jesus, when he was approaching Jerusalem, wept over it, and it's interesting, something he said on that occasion. Luke chapter 19, verses 42 through 44. Verse 41 says, Now as he drew near, he saw the city, that is Jerusalem, and wept over it, saying, If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace, but now they are hidden from your eyes.

This red horse took peace from the land. If they had only known how they could have had peace, but peace is now taken from them. And he says, For the days will come upon you when

your enemies will build an embankment around you, and surround you, and close you in on every side, and level you and your children within you to the ground, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.

Clearly, he's talking about the Roman invasion and the destruction of Jerusalem, very clearly. But he says, you know, it could have been so much different if you'd only known the things that would have promoted your own peace, your own shalom, your own well-being. Instead, it's taken from you, it's hidden from you.

And this red horseman takes away peace from the land. Certainly, that did happen at the outbreak of the war, and following throughout the war, really. Then, Revelation 5.5, 6.5, excuse me, 6.5. When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come.

And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A quart of wheat for a denarius, and a quart of barley, three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and the wine. Now, the scales were used, of course, in the marketplace, and therefore, one gets the impression that commerce is in some way affected.

Perhaps food supplies are affected, because the amount of money it costs to get a quart of wheat is rather exorbitant. A denarius was how much the average laborer made in a day. We know this from the Bible itself.

In some of the parables Jesus taught, he talks about laborers working for a day and receiving a denarius at the end of the day. That was their expected wage. A denarius was a day's wage, probably for 12 hours' work in all likelihood.

But a quart of wheat was about what a man would consume in a day. Now, if you could get a quart of wheat for a denarius, that means you have to work all day just to feed one man's stomach. What if you had a family to feed? Well, you could buy cheaper grain, barley.

You could get three quarts of that for a denarius. But in any case, food is at a premium, very expensive. The fact that he's carrying scales suggests that they are under judgment.

There is actually food shortage, and they have to eat their food by weight. So Leviticus 26 and verse 26 predicts. Leviticus 26 is a threat.

It's very much like Deuteronomy 28. Both places talk about what will happen to Israel if they rebel against God. And it's not a pretty thing.

And in Leviticus 26 and verse 26, he says, When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back to you your bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied. You won't just be able to eat as you normally do in times of prosperity as much as you want. You'll have to weigh it out.

You have to weigh out your bread. And that's exactly what we see going on here. There are scales in the hand of this rider, and he's weighing out bread.

You need a quart of wheat? You need three quarts of barley? Okay, that's going to cost you a day's wage. By the way, while we happen to be open to Leviticus 26, you might find it interesting that the whole chapter, of course, is talking about the judgments that God will bring on Israel if they're unfaithful. Look at verse 18.

He says, After all this, if you do not obey me, then I will punish you seven times for your sins. And he talks more about that. And in verse 21, he says, Then if you walk contrary to me and are not willing to obey me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues according to your sins.

And down in verse 24, Then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword against you that will execute vengeance of my covenant. Now, interesting.

In verse 28, Then I also will walk contrary to you in fury, and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. Now, of course, seven times is probably symbolic for total judgment. Seven is the number of completeness.

But it's also interesting that there's four times he says, I will judge you seven times. And you've got seven seals. You've got seven trumpets.

You've got seven bowls of wrath. There's also seven thunders. We're not sure what they apply to.

But some people have thought that the book of Revelation is consciously providing, as it were, the fulfillment of these threats. The judgments in Revelation are given in series of sevens. As in Leviticus said, if you rebel against me, I'll judge you seven times.

And I'll judge you yet seven more times, and yet seven more times, and so forth. But in any case, one of the judgments he says in chapter 26, verse 26 of Leviticus is, you'll eat your bread by weight. And there'll be shortages.

That does appear to be what God threatened he would do to Judah. And that is what is apparently happening here. Now, what actually did happen in the Jewish war? According to Josephus in his book, Wars of the Jews, or the Jewish War, in Book 5, Chapter 10, Paragraph 2, he made this comment about how the shortages of food affected people.

He said, many there were indeed who sold what they had for one quart. It was of wheat if they were of the richer sort, but of barley if they were poorer. Now, interesting that that has such close verbal parallels to Revelation, since Josephus never read Revelation, probably didn't even know the book existed.

He was writing in Rome probably at the time this was written, or maybe not. He may have been

in Jerusalem, but he wasn't reading Christian literature. But he says they gave all that they had.

Well, a denarius is all a person would have from working a day, and they're going to need a quart every day to eat. It cost all they had just to eat. If they were of the richer sort, they could buy a quart of wheat.

If they were not, they had to buy cheaper grain, barley. And that is not exactly the same words as Revelation, but it's mighty similar. And that is describing what actually conditions did prevail in Jerusalem during the siege.

Now, also, what about this statement at the end of verse 6, Revelation 6, 6, where it says, do not harm the oil and the wine. What's that about? Now, I'll tell you, many commentators have said that this third horseman, this third seal, represents famine or food shortages. Of course, different approaches to Revelation see the famine as pertaining to different times in history.

But what often they say, and probably the most common thing they say, is that in times of drought, the grain crops are in short supply. Why? Because grain has shallow roots. Grain dries up more quickly, it needs the water more frequently.

But oil comes from olive trees, and wine comes from grapevines, and their roots are deeper. So that in a time of drought, you're going to lose your barley and your wheat quicker than you lose your oil and your wine. So, some say this is talking about a moderate drought, a moderate famine, really.

That there's shortages of the grain crops, the cereal crops, but some foods are still available. However, oil and wine is not really a staple for your diet. Grain is, and therefore people are hurting, but it's not been such a drought as to knock out the vines and the olive trees.

Now, another interpretation often given to this, touch not the oil and wine, is that they say oil and wine are more like the luxuries. And they say the common people will have a hard time making ends meet, even feeding their families. But it seems like even in hard economic times, the rich always seem to be able to have their luxuries.

They don't seem to be touched by it. Some say that. Now, I think maybe not, either of those things.

Although, maybe so. That could be true, even during the famines in Jerusalem. I'm sure there were the rich who still had their luxuries.

But, Josephus has an interesting little anecdote that some preterists think might be related to this, do not touch the oil and wine. And that is that, during the siege of Jerusalem, I mentioned there were warring factions inside the city, Jews against Jews. And one of the leaders of one of these factions, according to Josephus, was a man named John Gishallah.

And John Gishallah was a rebel leader, a tyrant, as Josephus calls him. And at one point, he and

his troops, those who were with him, positioned themselves actually in the temple. And they raided the temple stores.

And there were like sacred oil and sacred wine there, which was supposedly only used for the sacrifices. But they didn't revere them, and they just kind of indulged in drinking the wine and using the oil and so forth, anointing themselves with oil, so that it was a sacrilege. And Josephus writes it this way.

This is in his book, The Wars of the Jews, or Jewish War, sometimes translated either way. Book 5, chapter 13, and paragraph 6, he said, Accordingly, drawing the sacred wine and oil, which the priests kept for pouring on the burnt offerings, and which was deposited in the inner temple, John Gishallah distributed them among his adherents, who consumed without horror more than a hin in anointing themselves and drinking. So they actually defiled and broke into the oil and the wine that was not supposed to be touched.

And so some say, well maybe the statement, don't touch the oil and the wine, no matter how bad things get, it was violated by this man. Obviously there's a lot of different opinions about what is meant by don't touch the oil and the wine. But in any case, the conditions of shortage and the economic difficulties in just feeding a family are mentioned here.

And Josephus bears testimony to the fact that that was essentially how it was. People would give all they had for a quart of wheat, or maybe three quarts of barley. Now, Revelation 6-7, When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come.

And I looked, and behold, a pale or a green horse. The name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. Now the first thing I want to point out is Death is not a person, does not ride a horse.

When we see these horses and their riders, this is symbolic. That should be obvious. I would think it obvious there probably are not horses and riders literally in heaven, coming down and doing these things.

Although technically it doesn't say they come from heaven. They are invited by heaven. The living creatures, who apparently bear some kind of authority to call them, call them forth.

It's a heavenly summons, but we don't read that the horses actually come from heaven. There are no doubt, no actual horses that are appearing here. It's a vision.

These horsemen represent something, obviously. If one of them represents famine, and one represents civil war, and one represents conquest and so forth, obviously this one represents death. These are not actual horses or actual people on horses.

This is a dramatic representation of concepts, humanized, personified. It's important to note that at this point, early in the visions, Death and Hades are both personified. A horseman and his runner behind.

At the end of Revelation chapter 20, Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire. Along with the beast, the false prophet, the dragon, and all the other bad guys, essentially. Death and Hades are... We need to see what kind of a book we're reading here.

We're reading a book where things that aren't people are described in personal terms, anthropomorphized. Therefore, it's one of the things to take note of that the book of Revelation is written in symbols. I would think that would be self-evident.

I remember reading Henry Morris' commentary on Revelation, called the Revelation Record. He wrote the Genesis Record, which is very excellent in my opinion, and he decided to write the Revelation Record next, just so he'd bracket the Bible with his commentaries. Unfortunately, his expertise on Revelation was not the same as on Genesis, and he wrote a dispensational commentary.

As dispensationalists tend to champion the literal interpretation, Dr. Morris, whom I dearly love, he's a very precious man, godly brother, but I think he made the mistake of thinking that Revelation is supposed to be taken literally. He said in his introduction to his commentary, this will probably be the most literal commentary on Revelation that has ever been written. As I read it, I thought, probably so.

He did take everything pretty literally, but I thought it interesting when he came to these horsemen, he made a statement, he said, the events on earth are literal. The horses, he said, of course, are symbolic, because he said there are no horses in heaven. Now, I had nothing to disagree with in that statement.

I felt like he was being very reasonable in suggesting there are no horses in heaven, and the events on earth were literal, but the horses themselves were symbolic. And I thought it interesting that a man who is so committed to literal interpretation of Revelation, even he could not take the horses literally. However, I found a man more literal than he, and that was my friend, not my, I mean, acquaintance.

Wayne and I are not friends in the sense that we don't really hang out. But H. Wayne House, another dispensational writer, actually read part of my manuscript for Revelation of Four Views before it was published and made some commentary. I submitted it to him for him to take a look.

He is a dispensational scholar. And I quoted Henry Morris there saying, there are no horses in heaven. And Wayne House wrote a note on it that says, who says there's no horses in heaven? And in other words, Wayne House is saying, well, I'm willing to take even that literally.

Well, I guess anyone can do that if they wish. But it should be obvious that whether there are horses in heaven or not, these horses are symbolic. They represent war.

They represent civil disunity. They represent famine and food shortage. They represent things that aren't actual people.

And the horses, in this case, death is personified, followed by Hades. We have to see, this is not a literal description. This is a symbolic description of some things that literally did happen.

What did happen? It says, and power, verse 8, was given to them over a fourth of the land, or earth, depending on your viewpoint, to kill with the sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth, or the land. But to kill with what? Sword, hunger, death, and the beasts of the earth. Now, the word death there is thanatos.

It's the same as the name of the rider on the horse himself. Death is riding the horse. But thanatos is a word which the Septuagint, that is the Greek Old Testament, used more than 50 times to translate the Hebrew word for pestilence.

In the Old Testament, there are many occurrences of the word for pestilence. And more than 50 times, the Septuagint used the word thanatos to translate pestilence. And therefore, although thanatos literally means death, it obviously, in the time of John, in the time of the Greek Bible, it stood in for the word pestilence as well.

So that these four things could be read as sword, hunger, pestilence, and beasts of the earth. Which is, of course, what I think it actually does mean. And that makes it a clear allusion to something in the Old Testament.

Something that helps us understand what we're looking at here. In Ezekiel 5, in verse 17, God says, So we've got famine, wild beasts, pestilence, and the sword. But more to the point, if you look at Ezekiel 14.

Ezekiel 14, verse 19. Actually, the whole section. I don't want to read the whole section, but let's just look at verse 21.

To cut off man and beast from it. Now what's interesting is the four severe judgments are said specifically, these are my four severe judgments against Jerusalem. John knew that.

The Holy Spirit knew that. And of all the things that could have been said about this death, and Hades, and the fourth horseman, what the Holy Spirit chose to say is that it was these four severe judgments that are against Jerusalem that killed off a quarter of the people in the land. And so at the end of verse 8, we read that these killed with the sword, with hunger, with pestilence, and with beasts of the earth.

The very same things that Ezekiel calls the four severe judgments on Jerusalem. Or in the King James, the four sore judgments. Okay, so to my mind, there's quite a few allusions here to things in the scripture pertaining to Jerusalem, things in Josephus about the Jewish war, and therefore things that point our sight to Jerusalem, which is where we should expect it to go since we're now seeing the judgment on those who have killed the martyrs, whom Jesus very clearly calls, says to be Jerusalem.

Now, the fifth seal, as I say, we've talked about with some, we've spent some time on it, says,

when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who have been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they had held. That could be Old Testament prophets and New Testament preachers as well. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, how long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth or on the land.

And a white robe was given to each of them, and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. Now, I don't need to say much more about this since it's come up for discussion several times. But one point I have not made is that what he saw was the souls of the martyrs at the foot of the altar.

Now, the altar, I believe, is in heaven. I believe John's visions are in heaven. It could, I suppose, be a vision of the earthly altar.

But John, in Revelation, sees at various points tabernacle furniture, temple furniture in heaven. At one point, he sees the Ark of the Covenant in heaven. Another time, he sees, of course, the incense altar, where the prayers of the saints are offered with incense.

He sees, well, the Holy of Holies he sees up there. In this case, I think he sees the altar, which probably is the altar of sacrifice. The reason for that is because of what's at its foot.

The souls of the martyrs are at the foot of the altar. And in the Jewish ritual, according to Leviticus 4 and verse 7, the Jewish priests, when they slit the throat of an animal, would drain its blood at the foot of the altar. So this would be where the blood of the sacrifice would collect, at the foot of the altar, below the altar.

Now, interestingly, this is the souls of the martyrs, but they are sort of standing in for the blood of the martyrs. After all, it does say in Leviticus 17, 11, the nephesh of the flesh is in the blood. The soul of the flesh, or the life of the flesh, is in the blood.

Nephesh is the word used, soul. The soul of the flesh is in the blood. If it's blood or soul, it's the life.

And the lives of the martyrs have been shed and spilled. Now, what's interesting, it says, those who've been slain. The word slain there is the specific word for sacrificing an animal, slitting its throat.

In fact, the word was used in chapter 5, in verse 6, when he saw Jesus as a lamb that had been slain, that is sacrificed. And so these people are martyrs, and their death is viewed not just as a death, but as a sacrifice, something offered to God. We are told by Paul in Romans 12, 1, that we should present our bodies as a living sacrifice.

And that is true, as long as we're alive, our bodies should be offered to the Lord, as if we're on the altar and holy unto the Lord, and we're available for his service. But there comes a time

when we become a dying sacrifice, not a living sacrifice, if martyrdom happens to be our privilege. And so, these people have been sacrificed.

They've been sacrificed like a lamb. Their blood, or rather their souls, are collecting at the foot of the altar, like the blood of the sacrifices. Interestingly enough, those who sacrifice them are no doubt Jewish priests.

That's who would pour out the blood at the foot of the altars, the Jewish priests in Leviticus. And the Jewish priesthood was, of course, the Sanhedrin. And, well, the Sanhedrin were not all priests, but the head of the Sanhedrin was the high priest.

And Caiaphas, the high priest, had set Jesus up, and it was the Sanhedrin, initially, that crucified Christ, and also Stone Stephen, and so forth. In other words, these people were sacrificed, very possibly, their blood is being laid at the door of the high priests, or the priests. Because they did persecute Christ and the apostles.

Anyway, their blood, or their souls, are crying with a loud voice. Remember, Abel's blood cried from the ground when Cain slew Abel? And, by the way, Jesus said, all the righteous blood that was shed from Abel's blood on will be laid at the door of this generation, he said. This generation will pay the price for all the righteous blood from Abel's on.

Well, Abel's blood, the first martyr, the first innocent victim to be killed for righteousness sake, his blood cried from the ground. What did it cry for? Apparently, for vengeance. Apparently, for vindication.

Apparently, for God to step in and do something to redress the wrong. So, also, the souls of the martyrs are crying out, as did the blood of Abel from the ground, saying, when will you avenge our blood? And they're told, it'll happen. And we saw already at the beginning of this lecture that in chapter 19, verse 2, we find that God has now, at the end of the book, avenged their blood.

So, the un-avenged blood of the martyrs seems to be presented to us as the unfinished business at the beginning of the book. And, the avenged blood of the martyrs is the finished business at the end of the book. So, that essentially the book is about the avenging of their blood.

Now, the sixth seal, verse 12. I looked when he opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair. That would be goat's hair, probably.

Sackcloth made out of goat's hair, they had black hair. And the moon became like blood, and the stars of heaven fell to the earth as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man. Seven different categories given, just, they're not counted for us, but it's one of the many sevens in the book of Revelation. It almost becomes redundant to list all these, but they, I think it's intentional to get through seven, get the list up to seven types.

All people, in other words, the complete population, hid themselves in caves and in rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath has come, and who is able to stand? This passage is so full of wonderful things that support the thesis that we are looking at the destruction of Jerusalem in this. First of all, we have both cosmic and geological seismic disturbances.

There's an earthquake, the sun, moon and stars are affected. In fact, the whole heavens are rolled up like a scroll. All the mountains and islands vanish.

Now, none of these things are literal, and that can be demonstrated that they're not. They're no more literal than the red horse and the white horse and the green horse are literal. They are symbols, and they are well-known symbols.

Fortunately for us, since we don't usually speak with such symbols, and our modern writers don't, we have many examples of it in the biblical writers, that these are commonplace symbolic things. Even in this passage itself, without looking any further, we could easily see that it's not literal, because it says in verse 14, the middle of that verse, every mountain and island was moved out of its place. So we lose our mountains and our islands there.

But then how is it that at the end of verse 15, people are calling out to hiding themselves in caves and in the rocks of the mountains? Where did these mountains come from? And they said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us. Well, I thought all the mountains were gone now. All the mountains and hills were removed.

But now we've got people hiding in the rocks of the mountains and calling for the mountains to hide them. Obviously, we're not supposed to be taking this as a literal set of events. This is something to absorb as a horrendous judgment, which is described in terms cosmic and seismological.

For example, of course, when it says the sun became black as sackcloth of hair and the moon became like blood. This language is coming from Joel chapter 2 in verse 31. And that passage is quoted by Peter.

So we don't have to guess about the timing of its fulfillment. You know that in Joel chapter 2, verses 28 through 31, it talks about God pouring out his spirit on all flesh. And your sons and daughters prophesy.

And it goes on to talk about cosmic disturbances. And Peter, on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, is explaining what is actually going on before the eyes of those people in Jerusalem.

As they see, the spirit has fallen.

There's tongues of fire over the heads of the Christians. They're speaking in unknown tongues that they've never learned. Someone wants an explanation.

He says, okay, here it is. In Acts 2.16, it says, but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. He quotes him.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your young men shall see visions.

Your old men shall dream dreams. And on my men's servants and my maid's servants, I'll pour out of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. Now, he could have ended the quote there, if all he wanted to talk about was Pentecost.

Because that's the point at which Joel stops talking about Pentecost. But Joel continues. And Peter apparently felt the remainder of this quote is relevant, too, to what is happening right now.

He says, I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Now, there is a reference here to the great and notable day of the Lord. In Joel, it actually says the great and terrible day of the Lord. Or great and, yeah, terrible is the word used in our translation in Joel 2.31. There's this great and terrible day of the Lord coming.

And before it comes, God will pour out his spirit on the remnant in Israel. And then will come those events that precipitate the great and terrible day of the Lord. Those are described in these terms.

There will be wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath, blood and fire, pillars of smoke. Now, you know, there certainly was that. In Jerusalem, there was blood.

Josephus said the streets were running like streams of blood. There was so much bloodshed going on in the streets. Fire, yeah, there was that.

The temple was burned. Other parts of the city were burned. There were great billows of smoke going up.

And this caused the sun to appear to be darkened and the moon to appear to be blood. Now, there is a literalness about that because thick smoke does darken the sky. It does darken the sun from view.

And actually, blood is actually the color the moon sometimes looks when there's smoke in the

sky. I know because I grew up in L.A. And when I was growing up, they didn't have catalytic converters on the cars. And you could see the color of the sky on a regular basis.

It was gray. You know, air is supposed to be colorless. It was not.

In L.A., it was not colorless. It was gray. And sometimes it was so bad, your eyes would burn just to go outside because there was so much smoke, exhaust mixed with the air.

And there were some nights when you'd go out and there was a full moon. And you'd look, and if the moon was low on the horizon, it looked literally as red as an apple. It looked blood red.

Those of us who were dispensationalists back then had many a night. When we looked at the moon and it was literally blood red, we said, whoa. We really thought this was it coming.

But you see, that's just the effects of smoke in the air. It makes the moon look red. If the smoke is thick and dark, it darkens the sun.

That's what's going to happen. Jerusalem is going to have pillars of smoke, fire, blood in the streets. The sun darkened.

The moon turned into blood before the great and terrible day of the Lord, said Joel, said Peter. And the fact that Peter quoted it on this occasion in a statement that began with, this is that, meaning this is the time of fulfillment, means that Joel predicted two things. He predicted an outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and burning and bloodshed, trouble.

And of course, we have seen already in our studies of the Old Testament how often that is the case, that the fall of Jerusalem is joined in prophecy with the new order, the age of the Spirit, the age of the Messiah. And Joel mentions these two, and Peter doesn't just mention the first part. He mentions the whole thing and says, this is what's happening.

This is the age you're living in right now, the age Joel talked about. In other words, the destruction of Jerusalem is imminent, and the outpouring of the Spirit is a clue that this is the time you need to be watching out for that. Now, if you look at the passage in Revelation again, we have these two phenomena, the same ones, clearly taken from Joel.

It says, the sun became black as sackcloth, and the moon became like blood. At the end of chapter 6 of Revelation, those who are hiding say, the great day of his wrath has come. Obviously, this is the great and terrible day of the Lord that Joel predicted.

It's that great day of his wrath. Malachi also spoke of that day. He called it the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

We'll be looking at Malachi shortly as a cross-reference to some of this. But, we see that a passage about the fall of Jerusalem in Joel, quoted by Peter and so identified, is informing this passage also. With the sun turning black, the moon turning to blood.

It says in verse 13, the stars of heaven fell to the earth as a fig tree drops its late figs when it's shaken by a mighty wind, and the sky receded as a scroll. Both of these images, stars falling like figs, and the sky being rolled up like a scroll, actually come from Isaiah chapter 34. And, taken at face value, the passage is about the destruction of Edom.

Isaiah 34 and verse 4, it says, all the host of heaven should be dissolved. That means the stars. The heaven should be rolled up like a scroll.

That's imagery that is now found in the sixth seal in Revelation. And, their host, meaning the stars, shall fall down as a leaf falls from the vine and as the fruit falling from a fig tree. It's very obvious that Revelation 6 is deliberately adopting this imagery from Isaiah chapter 34 verse 4. But, the next line in Isaiah 34 says, for my sword shall be bathed in heaven.

Indeed, it shall come down on Edom, on the people of my curse. So, Edom here is said to be under judgment. I have suggested on other occasions that Edom might here be a representation for Jerusalem.

But, whether it is or not, it is clear that this rolling up of the heavens like a scroll is not a sign to the end of the world. We're not looking at the literal end of the universe. These things are not really happening in the sky.

This is just the apocalyptic language that is used of judgments, such as we would find in the judgment of Edom. Which, by the way, Edom is an extinct race today. So, this is not a future judgment of Edom.

There is no future for Edom. There is no present for Edom. There has not even been a past for Edom for the past 2,000 years.

It's been gone that long. So, clearly this rolling up of the heavens like a scroll and the stars falling, if literal, would certainly be the end of the universe. Although, of course, stars can't fall to the earth because the earth is much smaller than the stars and it just wouldn't work.

So, obviously, we're not looking at literal descriptions here. We're looking at apocalyptic imagery. These images are used throughout scripture to speak of nations falling or capital cities falling.

Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, Jerusalem, all in the Old Testament are spoken of as falling and terminology like this is used. Common in the prophets. Now, I mentioned that verse 14 where it says, Every mountain and island that was moved out of its place also cannot be taken.

Literally, since we have some mountains playing into the story in the next few verses. So, again, it's impressionistic. There's this great earthquake.

It moves everything. It changes everything. Even everything that seems so permanent.

Certainly, Jerusalem and its temple seemed permanent. As permanent as the everlasting hills.

But, they can go down too.

Just like Jerusalem can. And, it says in verse 15, The kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, etc. are going to hide themselves in caves.

Now, let's talk about the kings of the earth for a moment. I have said that earth, I believe, is best understood as land. But, were there kings of the land of Israel? Well, the term kings of the land or kings of the Eretz is found in Psalm chapter 2. And, in Psalm chapter 2, that is the Hebrew equivalent of this Greek phrase, is found in the opening verses.

Psalm 2, 1 says, Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth, this is the Hebrew equivalent of the phrase in Revelation, The kings of the earth set themselves and rulers take counsel together against Yahweh and against His Messiah. Anointed means the Messiah. Saying, let's break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.

That is, these powerful people are resisting God and resisting the Messiah. Now, if you look over at Acts chapter 4, we find that the apostles actually quote this verse. And, it's application in their minds is significant because they have been threatened by the Sanhedrin.

That if they preach anymore in the name of Jesus, they will suffer dire consequences. And so, they've gone back to their company of disciples and had a prayer meeting. And, in their prayer, they said, in verse 24, the middle of verse 24, they said, Lord, You are God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said, now they quote Psalm 2, Why did the nations rage and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth, there it is.

This time, it's the Greek phrase because the New Testament is written in Greek. It's the Septuagint phrase. It's the same phrase that we find in Revelation repeatedly.

Whenever you read of the kings of the earth in Revelation, it's this phrase. So, they say, the kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ. Now, the disciples see this as something already fulfilled.

They say, for truly, against Your holy servant Jesus whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. In other words, they see the fulfillment of this Psalm as having taken place in their time. Jesus is the Lord's Christ who has been resisted.

Who has been resisted? Him. Who are the kings of the earth? Well, Herod, Pontius Pilate, the rulers of the Jews. Herod ruled Galilee.

Pilate was the Roman official governing Judea. The Sanhedrin were the rulers of the Jews. These are the people that the apostles understand to be the kings of the earth in Psalm 2. In other

words, they had no trouble seeing this phrase as meaning the local rulers of Judea and Galilee.

The rulers of Israel. The rulers of the land of Israel. That's specifically how the apostles applied that phrase from the Old Testament.

Among those disciples was John. He was one of the ones praying with them on that occasion. He's also the one who wrote this book.

And he said, the kings of the earth. And this group is mentioned a number of times. This is the first time in Revelation.

But the rulers of the land would be how the apostles understood this phrase. And all these other groups of men. They hid themselves in caves in the rocks of the mountains and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

Now, there's an actual literal fulfillment of this. Josephus records it in his book, Wars of the Jews. In book 6, chapter 7, paragraph 3. This is when the Romans had broken through the walls.

And were now wreaking havoc on the Jews inside the city. This is at the end of the war. And it says, Josephus said, So now, the last hope which supported the tyrants, meaning the Jewish tyrants, like John Gashala and others.

The last hope which supported the tyrants and that crew of robbers who were with them, was in the caves and caverns underground. Whither, if they could once fly, they did not expect to be searched for, but endeavored that after the whole city should be destroyed and the Romans were gone, they might come out again and escape from them. This was no better than a dream of theirs, for they were not able to lie hid, either from God or from the Romans.

Notice Josephus sees the judgment on these people as from God. And he's a Jew himself, but he sees it as God judging a wicked city and the Romans judging it as the instruments. But notice, the last place they hid was in the caves and caverns under the city, hoping they would be spared the wrath of God and of the Romans.

And so we have these people in Revelation, they're hiding in the caves, because the wrath of the Lamb, the wrath of God is coming on them. Josephus, again, had no idea the degree to which he was confirming what Revelation said, because he didn't know about the book of Revelation, but there's more. Because we find these people saying to the rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

If you would look at Luke 23, Jesus gives us the inspired interpretation of this passage. In Luke 23, verses 28-31, Jesus is making his way to Golgotha with his cross. Verse 27 says, A great multitude of the people followed him and women who were also mourning and lamenting him.

And he turned to them, he turned to the mourners and he said, The daughters of Jerusalem,

verse 28, Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. Your generation and your children's generation are going to face something that you should be weeping for, you inhabitants of Jerusalem, you daughters of Jerusalem. Sounds like something might happen to Jerusalem in the lifetime of those women and their children.

For indeed, the days are coming in which they will say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts which never nursed. Then they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us and to the hills, Cover us. That sounds rather similar to Revelation chapter 6. And Jesus says, For if they do these things in the green wood, or in some translation, the green tree, what will be done in the dry? Jesus is a good tree.

He's a live tree. He's fruitful. Not like that fig tree that was withered and no one will eat fruit of it again because it's withered and dried.

Israel has become a withered, fruitless tree. Jesus, however, he still has redeeming qualities, unlike the dry tree. But if the Romans are treating me this way, he says, how are they going to treat you? If they do this to someone like me, I'm not even a criminal.

I'm not even worthless like you. I'm not dried up and fruitless like this vine, Israel. I'm the true vine.

I bear fruit. If they do this to somebody who has value, what will they do to a tree that has no value? In other words, what will they do to Jerusalem? You women, you daughters of Jerusalem and your children, what are they going to do to you folks? If they do this to me, as he's saying. He says, the time will come when the Romans are going to do worse things to Jerusalem than they're doing to Jesus right here.

And he says, they will then say to the mountains, cover us, fall on us, hide us. Jesus predicted that before John wrote Revelation. And John's description is of these people saying those very words, or essentially those very words.

The mountains and rocks are saying, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. This is, of course, the Roman invasion, but that is in the book of Revelation described as the wrath of Christ and the wrath of God. For, they say, the great day of his wrath has come.

And who is able to stand? Now, this question sets up chapter 7. Because the answer to the question is given in chapter 7. This is the day of God's wrath on Jerusalem. This is the great and terrible day of the Lord. As Joel called it, or as Malachi called it, we shall see the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

But, will there be any survivors? This is such a bloody holocaust. This is such a wholesale judgment. Will there be anyone surviving? The rhetorical question, who shall be able to stand, suggests some doubt as whether anyone will.

Now, who shall be able to stand is a direct quotation from Malachi, associated with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. If you look at Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is mentioned in chapter 4 and in chapter 3. The last two chapters, there's only four chapters of Malachi. The third and fourth chapter both make reference to the great dreadful day of the Lord. Both passages mention John the Baptist coming in advance of it.

Of course, John the Baptist came and warned that the axe was at the root of the trees. The fan was in his hand. This day of the Lord was near.

Judgment was imminent. Well, Malachi said John would come and would do his best to turn people around before the great and terrible day of the Lord. So, we read in the end of Malachi 4, the end of the book, it says in verses 5 and 6, It says, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

That is before God would come to judge Jerusalem, he's going to send one in the spirit and power of Elijah to try to fix it. Try to turn them around. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with or the land with the curse.

By the way, the New American Standard, I believe, says, lest I strike the land with the curse. New King James says earth, but land obviously is an alternate translation. The curse is that which is mentioned in Deuteronomy 28, which would come on Israel if they are rebellious.

So, before God sends this great curse, this great and dreadful day of the Lord's judgment on Jerusalem, he will send Elijah the prophet to attempt to turn people around and avert the disaster. And he says it's Elijah, but Jesus, of course, we know, said, if you can receive it, John is Elijah who was to come. Jesus actually made this comment twice, just so we make sure we didn't miss it.

This Elijah prediction is pretty important, because it is the last prediction in the Old Testament. Just before the prophets went silent, a prediction was made of John the Baptist, who was the next prophetic voice that was heard. But in Matthew chapter 11, John had sent messengers to Jesus, and he had sent the messengers back to John with his answer.

And then as John's messengers were gone, Jesus decided to eulogize John to the crowds that were there. And he said in verse 11, He is Elijah who is to come. Now, that statement, who is to come, means who is predicted to come.

The only place in the Bible that Elijah is predicted to come is Malachi 4. There is no other prediction in the Old Testament of Elijah coming. So, he is alluding to Malachi chapter 4, I will send Elijah. You know, Elijah, who is supposed to come, John's him, if you can receive it.

Over in Matthew chapter 17, when the disciples actually saw Elijah and Moses up on the mountain of Transfiguration, as they were coming down from the mountain, in Matthew 17.10, the disciples asked Jesus, saying, why then do the scribes say Elijah must come first? Well, we

know why, because they took Malachi literally. They thought Elijah was literally going to come, because Malachi said, behold, I send Elijah the prophet. However, Jesus said to them, Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things.

Now, I myself have my own opinion about this statement. I think Jesus is quoting or paraphrasing, essentially, Malachi. In other words, why do the scribes say Elijah is going to come? And he quotes or paraphrases the verse that the scribes base this expectation upon.

It's not a direct quote, but it's essentially a paraphrase of the prophecy of Malachi. Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things. But then Jesus gives his commentary.

But I say to you that Elijah has come already. And they did not know him, but did to him whatever they wished. Now, this is a reference to John the Baptist.

It says in verse 13, the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist. So if you can receive it, this prophecy of Malachi about Elijah is about John the Baptist. And so the prediction is God's going to send John the Baptist to try to turn the apostate nation around so that he doesn't have to strike the nation with the curse.

However, if John fails to bring about national repentance, then the great and terrible day will come, which is, of course, what came in AD 70. And John predicted it, by the way, in Matthew 3. But look at Malachi chapter 3 now. Because we see that there's another time that Malachi talks about John the Baptist.

Malachi 3.1 Malachi 3.1 Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

But who can endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? Who can stand? That's the question raised at the end of Revelation chapter 6. But what is the context here? Just like Malachi 4, John the Baptist, and by the way, all the gospels, I think, quote Malachi 3.1 and apply it to John the Baptist. So we've got John the Baptist mentioned in Malachi 3.1 and also later in Malachi 4.5. But after it mentions John the Baptist, it talks about Jesus, the messenger of the covenant. He will come.

He'll suddenly come to his temple. This is a judgment coming. How do we know that? Because who can endure it when he comes? This is not talking about Jesus walking into Jerusalem and sitting in the temple steps and teaching.

That's not the sudden coming that people will have a hard time enduring. It's not even referring to him going into the scourge of cords and driving out a few animals. Lots of people survived that.

In fact, as far as we know, no people were even endangered by that. We don't have any record that Jesus hit a person. And if he did, he didn't kill anyone.

Who can survive this sudden appearance at his temple? This is the coming on the clouds where all the tribes of the land will mourn. This is the destruction of the temple. This is the destruction of Jerusalem.

And about that, it is legitimate to say who can endure that? Who can stand when that happens? Malachi is the last prophet God sent to say there is going to be a time when Jerusalem and Israel will be teetering on the verge of judgment. And the Messiah will be the one who comes and brings that judgment. But first, God will send the messenger to try to give you a chance to turn around.

But Malachi makes it very clear. They probably won't turn around because there's going to be this great and dreadful day of the Lord. The messenger of the covenant is going to suddenly come and do some serious harm.

And when he does, it will seem like no one would survive it. Who will stand? Who can endure it? Well, it is this line in Malachi 3.2 that is being quoted in Revelation 6. Those who are hiding in the caves. Those who are saying to the rocks, hide us.

Which is what Jesus said the inhabitants of Jerusalem would do. And they're saying, who is able to stand? As Malachi 3.2 raises that question in the connection with the destruction of Jerusalem. The answer to that comes in chapter 7. Now, where you would expect to see the 7th seal broken, you do not.

There is instead this interlude. And you're going to find this is true with the 7 trumpets and with the 7 bowls of wrath. That you get the first 6 in somewhat rapid succession.

And then there's a bit of an interlude before the 7th one. In the case of the bowls of wrath, it's not much of an interlude, but there's an interruption in the sequence. Here, the interruption is a full chapter.

In the case of the trumpets, the interruption between the 6th trumpet and the 7th trumpet is a chapter and a half. But it's sort of a stylistic pattern of the vision. Just as when you have these series of 7s, there's like an opening vision in heaven showing why this is happening on earth.

So also, when the series of 7s begin, the first 6 in the series go by rather quickly. And then there's an interruption before the 7th comes. Perhaps to answer some question that people would have.

In this case, the question is, is anyone going to survive this? Who will be able to stand when the Lord comes in wrath against those who killed Him? And who killed His saints? And who killed His prophets? When the blood of all the martyrs is brought upon that generation, will there be any survivors? The answer is yes, there will be. Quite a few, actually. They will be the Christians.

And we'll see that in chapter 7 when we come to it next time.

OpenTheo

Revelation 7 - 8

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg examines selected verses from Revelation 7 and 8, highlighting the symbolism and themes present in the text. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the context of the book and the significance of key details, such as the sealing of the 144,000 and the use of imagery from Old Testament scriptures. His insights shed light on the broader message of the book and the relevance of its teachings for contemporary audiences.

Transcript

In studying the book of Revelation, there are a few times that will be more rewarding than those times when we can actually make sense of what is saying by having explicit cross-reference in the scriptures elsewhere, so that we can actually make sense, unmistakably, of certain portions. There are many portions that probably, after all of our best efforts, we will still have some remaining questions unanswered about that will probably be inevitable, but there are some portions that are quite unmistakable when you actually see the other parts of the scripture that are alluded to and see how they're being woven together in the book of Revelation. We were looking at the breaking of the seven seals of the book.

The book, I believe, is the sentence upon apostate Jerusalem for the bloodshed of all the prophets and the saints from the time of Abel down to Zechariah. And then they crucified Jesus and persecuted the disciples. So this career of persecution continued even after the time of Christ, as Jesus said it would.

Jesus said to them, I will send you prophets and wise men and scribes, and some of them you'll persecute from city to city, some of them you'll kill, some of them you'll drive out of town, and so forth. And so Jesus did send, and we find in chapter 6 when the fifth seal was broken that we saw the martyrs in heaven under the altar saying, How long, O Lord, before you judge and avenge our blood upon those who dwell in the land? And there was then, with the sixth seal, this dramatic picture which looked like the end of the world. The sun was dark, the moon was dark, the stars fell from heaven, the heavens were rolled up like a scroll, the stars fell like figs from a fig tree, and so forth.

Every mountain and every island was removed, and people hid in caves and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of his wrath has come, and who is able to stand? Now I was saying at the end of our last session that this question, who is able to stand, is directly quoted from Malachi chapter 3 verse 2, which was a prophecy of the coming of Christ the first time after John the Baptist. And John the Baptist is mentioned in Malachi chapter 3 verse 1 as the messenger that is sent before the face of the Messiah. The Messiah is referred to as the messenger of the covenant.

And it says, He will suddenly come to his temple, but who may abide his coming? And this is making it very clear that the coming of Christ to his temple is not a reference to some light matter. It's not even something like Jesus driving the livestock out of the temple with a whip. There were very few really affected by that.

As far as we know, no human beings ever were threatened by Jesus, even in that incident. He drove the animals out. He didn't have to do anything to the people.

They followed their prophets. And so, that coming to the temple of which it is said, who will be able to endure it? Who will be able to stand it? And the second thing is, I believe, the coming of Christ in judgment in AD 70 to the temple, where the temple actually was destroyed, Jerusalem was destroyed, and there was a great bloodshed, a great holocaust, unfortunately. I mean, God weeps over that.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem when he knew that this was going to have to happen. And who did stand? Who did survive that? Well, the question is asked at the end of chapter 6, and it is answered at the beginning of chapter 7. Here we read, Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads. 12,000 were sealed.

Of the tribe of Manasseh, 12,000 were sealed. Of the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 were sealed. Of the tribe of Levi, 12,000 were sealed.

Of the tribe of Issachar, 12,000 were sealed. Of the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 were sealed. Of the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 were sealed.

Of the tribe of Benjamin, 12,000 were sealed. Now, this is the first half of the chapter. The second half takes another direction.

But, here we see 144,000 people sealed with the seal of God on their forehead. We are told that the four winds of the earth, the angels holding back the four winds of the earth, were told to not allow the winds to blow on the earth or the sea or on any tree. And it says in verse 3, Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

So, what's the purpose of this sealing? It is so that when the judgment does come, they may be preserved. We see this actually stated when the fifth trumpet sounds. Something we're going to

be seeing soon.

In chapter 9, these locusts come out of the bottomless pit. And in verse 4, chapter 9, verse 4 says, They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth or any green thing or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. So, just as when God sent his plagues upon Egypt, the plagues afflicted God's enemies, the Egyptians, but did not afflict the Hebrews, who were among them because they were God's people.

So, also, when God sends the plagues in Revelation, those who have the seal of God on their forehead are preserved. And God does not, in this vision, does not even allow the judgments to begin. Does not allow the earth or the sea or the trees to be even affected.

Doesn't even let the wind blow upon them until he has first identified and sealed those that will be protected from this judgment. Now, actually, when the judgment does begin and the trumpets begin to sound, we'll see that the trees and the earth and the sea are all affected. But they are not to be harmed until this sealing.

Now, interesting, it doesn't say, do not harm the earth, the sea, and the trees until I've removed my people from the earth. As, for example, if there was a pre-tribulation rapture. But rather, until I put my seal on them, and then when the judgments come, those who have the seal are preserved.

Now, this imagery of sealing the elect, sealing the remnant, in Jerusalem, before the fall of Jerusalem, has its precedent in Ezekiel. As many things in Revelation do. I think I mentioned I read an article recently where a man said he thought that the book of Ezekiel provided the outline for the book of Revelation.

That Revelation followed Ezekiel's outline. I have not been able to be, to do such a sophisticated analysis to see that to be so. But I have seen, of course, as everyone does, that Ezekiel's imagery and ideas are rebirthed in Revelation.

And, interestingly, of course, Ezekiel's time was the time where Jerusalem was about to be destroyed. Actually, Ezekiel lived through the destruction of Jerusalem. He was in Babylon, and about the first half of his ministry was before Jerusalem fell.

And the second half was afterwards. And so we have prophecies in Ezekiel from both before and after. But in the part before Jerusalem fell, we have this vision in chapter 9 of Ezekiel.

Let me turn your attention to it. Then he called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, Let those who have charge over the city, this means Jerusalem, draw near, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. These that had charge over the city were apparently angelic beings, maybe even demonic beings, it's hard to know.

And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper pool, upper gate, excuse me, which faces the north, each with his battle axe in his hand. One man among them was clothed with a

linen and had a writer's ink horn at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

Then we have the glory of the Lord appearing there. And in verse 4 it says, The Lord said to the man with the ink horn, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done in it. In other words, all the men who are sympathetic with God, who have the same attitude God has about the abominations that are done in the city.

So this is the faithful remnant in the city. They receive a mark on their forehead. And in verse 5 it says, To the others, he said in my hearing, go after him through the city and kill.

Do not let your eyes spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and their children and women, but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.

So they began with the elders who were before the temple. Now, we see then that when Jerusalem was to be destroyed, Ezekiel had this vision. It was not literal.

It was figurative. The people of Jerusalem were not killed by six angels with battle axes. They were killed by Babylonians who broke in.

The actual judgment came in the form of armies invading. But, symbolically, it was as if God was sending angels in to execute those who were ripe for execution. Those who had done things worthy of death, and those who he could no longer tolerate in Jerusalem.

And yet, before he did so, before he sent the judgment on Jerusalem, he marked on the foreheads those who were his remnant there. And John is, of course, obviously imitating, or I mean the vision that God gives John is imitating this vision, in some respects, in Ezekiel. Jerusalem is about to be destroyed, but God identifies, first of all, his remnant.

After all, it was asked, who will be able to stand when this judgment falls? Well, there will be some, and not a few, actually, because their number is said to be 144,000. Now, the 144,000 are said to be 12,000 from every tribe of Israel. However, the listing of the tribes is rather creative.

For example, the tribe of Manasseh is mentioned in verse 6, and so is the tribe of Joseph in verse 8. Now, Joseph was divided into two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim. So, the tribe of Joseph would actually include the tribe of Manasseh, but we have them listed separately. No doubt, the tribe of Joseph is intended to convey Ephraim.

So, we'd have Ephraim and Manasseh. But, there's a problem. Whenever you include Ephraim and Manasseh as complete tribes in a list, you actually end up with 13 tribes.

So, to keep the number at 12, someone has to be left out. In the Bible, this is commonly done. Ephraim and Manasseh are often listed in the tribal lists, but in order to keep the list at 12, sometimes some tribe or another is omitted.

Very often, it's Levi that's omitted, because the Levites were a separate tribe set aside for other matters. And so, you have the 12 omitting Levi. But, in this case, Levi is included.

The tribe that is missing is the tribe of Dan. And, there have been many people trying to explain why the tribe of Dan is omitted. Some people say it's because the tribe of Dan, according to the book of Judges, was the first tribe to get involved in idolatry after the settlement of the land of Canaan.

Others have said that Dan is going to be the tribe from which the Antichrist will come, and therefore, their tribe is omitted from this list of those who are saved. Actually, one of the church fathers suggested that. However, it's hard to know where in the world he got that.

In fact, there's no reference in the Bible to Antichrist coming from the tribe of Dan. And so, it seems to have been an entire fabrication, just apparently at one desperate attempt to explain why Dan isn't mentioned. Maybe the Antichrist is coming from that tribe, and that explains it.

Well, it might explain it, but it doesn't explain it with any credibility or authority. The truth is, we're not given any reason why that's obvious. It may be that Dan was more idolatrous than other tribes, or it may simply be that Revelation is not concerned with precision of fact as much as impression.

And in order to keep the tribes at 12, to indicate from the whole nation of Israel, the 12 tribes, someone had to be left out. Dan just happened to get the axe. And it may be not significant.

It may be that any other tribe could have been left out instead, and it wouldn't have been any different. We need to have 12 here. And the number 12,000 from each tribe is almost certainly symbolic.

There are people who believe the 144,000 will be a literal 144,000 people in the future. The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, believe there are literally 144,000 in their ranks who are called the Anointed Ones, the ones who will be in heaven where the other Jehovah's Witnesses will not. They will be in the New Earth.

Dispensationalists believe that during the Tribulation, after the Church has been taken out, that there will be 144,000 Jews who are converted, who become very evangelistic. And according to some dispensationalists, the 144,000 will be very effective during the Tribulation in turning people to Christ. People like Hal Lindsey and people like that who became famous for their dispensational books have said that you should try to picture the 144,000 as this number of Jewish Billy Grahams going about the world, converting more people in seven years of Tribulation than the Church converted in 2,000 years.

Now these are all very fanciful suggestions. There's nothing here about the 144,000 evangelizing anybody. There are, of course, after this, in the same chapter, a description of an innumerable company of people from every tribe and tongue who are saved, but it doesn't say that the 144,000 had any particular impact on them or influence upon them.

We simply have two groups of people mentioned. The 144,000 are mentioned one other place in the Bible, and that is in Revelation 14. In turning there, we actually get more information about them than we do in the longer section in chapter 7. We have only a few verses about them in chapter 14, verses 1 through 5, and although it's about a third as long a portion, I'm sorry, about half as long a portion, it actually has more information than chapter 7 has about them.

And so these two passages are all we have to identify who we're talking about here. In Revelation 14, 1, it says, Then I looked, and behold, a lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000, having his father's name written on their foreheads. So the mark that was on their forehead apparently is now morphed into the father's name on their foreheads, like a brand of ownership on a slave.

I would point out to you that this is immediately after the verse that talks about people who have the mark and the name of the beast on their foreheads. In chapter 13, the last verses of chapter 13 talk about people who are compromised and who are actually damned, receiving the mark of the beast on their forehead. But now we have the Christians, the believers, have their father's name on their foreheads.

And it says in verse 2, And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder, and I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps, and they sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures and the elders, and no one could learn that song except the 144,000 who were redeemed from the land. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God. Now here we have quite a list of identifiers of these people.

The first of them is that they are virgins and have not defiled themselves with women. I believe that the term have not defiled themselves with women explains what is meant by virgins. They are not literal virgins.

After all, a married man is not a virgin, but he has not defiled himself by being married. The Bible says marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled in Hebrews chapter 13. Marriage bed is not a defiling thing, and so these people are no doubt virginal or pure in the sense that they have not defiled themselves with the harlot, who is so prominent in the later chapters of Revelation.

They are not part of that system. The harlot is Babylon, the mother of harlots, the mother of prostitutes. These people, the 144,000, have not participated with that group.

And I think that is what is meant when it says they are virgins. They are not literal virgins. If they

were literal virgins, if one would decide that in order to be a part of this group and to be saved, you have to be a real virgin, that would strongly suggest that getting married would be wrong.

And Paul said to Timothy that people would teach doctrines of demons forbidding to marry. Forbidding to marry is a doctrine of demons, Paul said, but it would be a necessary doctrine. If you had to be a virgin to be saved, you could not be married.

And so, if they were literal virgins, you would be somewhat compelled to forbid marriage and therefore participate in doctrines that Paul refers to as demonic. This is figurative. Just like the great harlot is figurative.

There is compromise that many have been involved in. Unfaithfulness to God. Covenant breaking.

These are not among those who have been doing that. They are faithful. They are undefiled.

It says, these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Now, the Lamb, of course, is Jesus, and therefore those who follow Him are His followers, His disciples. They are Jewish, we know that from chapter 7. Now we know they are Christians.

They are Jewish Christians. They are Jewish disciples of Jesus and they have kept themselves pure. They are not part of the generality of those who have defiled themselves with the harlot.

It says, next, they were redeemed from among men. Well, that could refer to any kind of Christians. All Christians have been redeemed by Christ among men, so that is not giving us more information.

But this might help. Being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. These are Jewish Christians who are said to be the firstfruits unto God from the 12 tribes.

Let me show you something interesting. In James chapter 1. James chapter 1 and verse 1. James 1.1 says, James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ to the 12 tribes, which are scattered abroad. So the people he is writing to are Jewish from the 12 tribes.

However, he says in verse 2, my brethren, I mean chapter 2, verse 2, chapter 2, verse 1. James 2.1 says, my brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. So he assumes that they are holding the faith of Christ. He says, don't do so with partiality.

And it says in verses 6 and 7 of chapter 2. You have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts. Do not they blaspheme the noble name by which you are called.

Obviously a reference to Christ's name. The readers are Christians. They hold the faith of Jesus Christ.

They are Jewish from the 12 tribes. Now look what he says to them in chapter 1, verse 18. He says, of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Who? Jewish Christians from the 12 tribes, contemporary with James, first century. First century Jewish Christians. They are the first fruits.

Understandably, when God began to harvest souls, when he began to bring in the net, harvest the grain and get rid of the chaff, the Jews were the first from whom a remnant was taken. The disciples were all Jewish. Jesus was Jewish.

The disciples were all Jewish. The first many thousands of converts were Jewish. We know in Acts that there were 3,000 Jewish converts on the day of Pentecost.

Then a few days later there were 5,000 men and not including women and children in the church. So the church had grown to probably 15,000, 20,000 at that time. We do not receive any further numbers except in many cases it says the church continued to grow.

We do not know how many Jewish believers there were in the Jerusalem church before Gentiles were included in the church. But initially it was all Jews. All of our original brothers and sisters were Jewish.

They were the remnants in the first century, the ones who escaped the Holocaust of 70 AD. They were the first fruits unto God. The rest of us have been harvested since then.

And so it is pretty easy to identify the 144,000. They are the first fruits. They are Jews in the first century.

They are believers. And if you look at Revelation 14.5 it says, In their mouth was found no guile. Do you remember what Jesus said about Nathanael? In John chapter 1 when he saw Nathanael coming to him he said, There is an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile.

It says of Jesus in Isaiah 53, There was no guile found in his mouth. What is guile? Guile is simply duplicity, dishonesty, hypocrisy, pretension. You see when Jesus came to Israel he found that the main religious leaders were very pretentious, hypocritical.

That is the main thing he said in evaluating them. You are hypocrites. But there were some in Israel who were not hypocrites.

There were genuine guileless Jews. Nathanael was one of them. And Jesus said, Here comes a true Israelite, one in whom is no guile.

Now these ones are like Nathanael. Disciples, Jewish disciples in whom is no guile. They are part of the honest and faithful remnant in Israel.

And it says they are without fault before the throne of God in Revelation 14. So we've gotten I

think enough to be able to identify who we're talking about here. We're talking about that Jewish church in Jerusalem.

The first Christians, the first fruits, the original converts of the apostles. And they were the ones who were like those in Ezekiel's day. Who were not of the same spirit of the wicked and the apostate.

They were sighing and crying over the abominations done in Jerusalem. Like those in Ezekiel's day who received the mark on their forehead and who were preserved when the judgment came. So also when chapter 6 ends with the question, who will be able to stand? The answer is these people will.

The ones who have the mark of God on their forehead. Who are they? They are the Christians in the first century in Jerusalem who did in fact escape. I've mentioned this before but I have with me the quote from the historian Eusebius.

He wrote around 325 A.D. And he wrote a church history. And when he was writing about A.D. 70 and about the Roman invasion of Jerusalem. He wrote these words.

The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan called Pella. The whole Christian church escaped this holocaust. They were residents of Jerusalem so they would ordinarily have been caught in the siege like everybody else.

And would have suffered all the deprivations and the crimes and the pestilence and so forth. But they were warned by a divine revelation to escape. And they did escape.

And so this is God marking his own. Before he brings the judgment down and he brings them out to a place of safety. And so the judgments of which we are about to read, especially when the trumpets begin to blow, do not begin until God has made sure he knows who his own are.

Has identified them and they are the ones who when the judgments come, the judgments bypass them. And do not harm them. Now after 144,000, in Revelation 7 verse 9 it says, After these things I looked and behold a great multitude which no one could number of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb.

And all the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures and fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor, and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.

There happen to be seven attributes mentioned here. Verse 13, Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?

And I said to him, Sir, you know. That's what Ezekiel said when he saw the dry bones and the angels said, Can these bones live, Ezekiel? Ezekiel thought, hmm.

Is this a trick question? And he said, Sir, you know. You're going to have to answer me. And then of course he was given an answer.

And John, responding as Ezekiel did, just said, Sir, you know. I don't know who these people are. You do.

So he said to me, These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation. Now that's interesting. But in the Greek, it's present tense.

Those who are coming out of the great tribulation. In John's day, these people were coming out of the great tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

You know this is symbolic because blood is not a whitening agent. But it's talking about cleansing their conscience and their record and their character by the blood of Christ. Which is symbolic to produce their robes.

Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore.

The sun shall not strike them nor the heat. For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

So these details are simply telling what apparently these people who It would seem they died because they're seen in heaven. When they've gone to heaven, this is what is true of them. They don't have any more discomfort.

They don't ever hunger or thirst again. They are cared for by Jesus like a shepherd takes care of his sheep. His lambs.

And they spend their time worshipping God in the temple. Now this would be of course what we would call the intermediate state. Sometimes we think of heaven as the place where we're going to spend eternity.

And we read these pictures of heaven and say is that what it's going to be like up there? And actually this is all very symbolic of course. The language is impressionistic. But the point is this isn't the eternal state.

This is where people are gone when they die. There's still a judgment to come. There's still a lake of fire for some and a new heaven's new earth for others.

Heaven is not where we live forever. Heaven is where we go to be with Jesus until he leaves there. And he will leave there when he comes back here.

And so when Jesus comes back, those who have died with Christ, he will bring with him. And there will be a new heaven's new earth. So this description is apparently of people who have died.

It says they have come up out of the great tribulation. It doesn't say they've died but they appear to be in heaven. And because they're in heaven we have to assume their life is over.

They've made it through. Now were they martyred? Maybe. We don't know.

If there's great tribulation, it's a good chance that a fair number of them died through martyrdom. But it doesn't specify that. What it does say is that they have been faithful.

And the most important thing that is said about them is that there was a great multitude of them, which no one could number, in verse 9, from all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. Now some commentators feel that when we read about the 144,000 in the first nine verses of this chapter, that we are actually reading of the spiritual Israel. Actually, the Jehovah's Witnesses are among those who would say so.

The 144,000, though it's said that there are 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, they say, well, this is spiritual. And, of course, we know that there are times when Israel is spiritual in the Bible. There are evangelical commentators who believe that the 144,000 represent the church militant on earth, and the people we just read about in heaven are the church victorious in heaven.

That at any given time, part of the church is still on earth fighting the battles, and another part has already died and gone on to heaven, and that John has seen both. And that the 144,000 are not necessarily really Jewish, they're just the spiritual Israel. However, I personally believe that John labors to tell us that the first group are, in fact, Jewish, and contrasts them with the second group in that very respect.

There are two contrasts between these groups that tell us that they're not just different ways of looking at the same thing. One is that 144,000 are numbered, and he specifically says in verse 4, I heard their number. But the second group in verse 9 says no one could number.

This is an immense group that nobody can number. It's an innumerable company, as opposed to the 144,000, which is a large company, but not too large to number. Still, it's the smaller portion of the body of Christ.

The Jewish converts are many in number. Hundreds of thousands of Jewish people have been saved, maybe millions. But they're still in the minority, and so the 144,000 are Jewish people, and their number is given.

The people from all the other rest of the world, of course, with many other nations participating, outnumber them by a factor of who knows how much. They're innumerable. You can't count them.

But the other thing that is different is that while the 144,000, John labors to emphasize they are Jewish, there's 12,000 from this tribe, there's 12,000 from that tribe, and even though I don't think those are literal numbers, it's definitely trying to say these are people from the 12 tribes. Whereas the second group, which is not only more in number and innumerable, but it's also ethnically more diverse, because verse 9 says the second group are from all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. So the contrast between the first group in the first eight verses and the group in the latter eight verses could not be greater.

The first group is innumerable, the second group innumerable. The first group are Jews, the second group are Gentiles, or at least people from all nations could include Jews, but the point is that the 144,000 are the first fruits of this group. But John has shown that not only will there be some who survive this great terrible holocaust of 70 AD, which is what brought these people to our attention in the first place, the question about that, but not only will they survive, but there will be many, many more besides them that will wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb and be white and be worshipping God forever alongside the Jewish believers.

So you've got Jews and Gentiles coming in, and that of course is pretty standard for the stories that talk about the destruction of Jerusalem. They often talk about the destruction of Jerusalem and then they talk about the Gentile evangelism. Actually, in history, Gentiles were widely evangelized before Jerusalem fell.

Paul's entire ministry was before the fall of Jerusalem, and yet he evangelized Gentiles all over Western Europe. But nonetheless, when Jerusalem had fallen, then the entire church mission was international. There wasn't any center in Jerusalem anymore.

It was now all the nations. That was the venue for the church's activities, and so we have this eventually innumerable people coming out. Now these people are coming up out of the Great Tribulation.

What does that mean? Does that mean that they actually are people who died in the midst of the Tribulation? Does it mean they have come to heaven as a result of the Great Tribulation? That is because this Tribulation came on the Jews in 70 AD. The Gospel went out more far and wide, and their conversion was the result of that. Does it suggest maybe that the Great Tribulation is long, and maybe is the entire period from the beginning of the Jewish War until the end of the age? It is possible to see it that way.

I'll tell you why. Because if you compare Matthew 24, which is the only other place that mentions the Great Tribulation, Matthew 24, verse 21, Jesus said, Then there shall be great tribulation, such as never was since the world began, nor ever shall be. In the New Testament, that is the only place the Great Tribulation is mentioned besides the verse we read here in

chapter 7, verse 14.

But in Luke's parallel, in Luke chapter 21, instead of saying the Great Tribulation, Luke has a paraphrase of it. And this is the paraphrase. Where Matthew 24, verse 21 says, There shall be great tribulation, Luke 21, verses 23 and 24 expand it out.

They don't just say there will be great tribulation, but here is what Luke says. Verse 23, But woe to those who are pregnant and those who are nursing babies in those days. Now, Matthew says that too, but then he says, For then there shall be great tribulation.

But Luke says, For there will be great distress in the land, that's in the land of Israel, and wrath upon this people. This people would be his own people, the Jews. And they will fall by the edge of the sword.

They will be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Now, Matthew 24 doesn't mention the times of the Gentiles or Jerusalem being trampled by the Gentiles.

It just mentions there will be great tribulation coming on. But Luke makes it clear that this tribulation involves the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles. And this goes on for how long? Not seven years.

Not three and a half years. But until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. In other words, from 70 AD to the end of the world.

What God is drawing in the Gentiles. He brought in the first fruits before 70 AD. And after 70 AD, the harvest is somewhat more general.

And the harvest goes on until they're all harvested in. Until the fullness of the Gentiles become in, as Paul put it in Romans 11.25. Here, the times of the Gentiles being fulfilled appears to be. Now, it doesn't say it in unmistakable terms.

But the sound of the passage in Luke sounds like the times of the Gentiles are coextensive with the great tribulation. Or the time of distress that Jerusalem is being trampled by the Gentiles. And by most accounts, although the term times of the Gentiles is admittedly ambiguous.

Most scholars believe the times of the Gentiles means the age of the church. The time during which the Gentiles are being evangelized. Now, if that is coextensive with the tribulation, then we're making a mistake to think of the tribulation as being restricted to the three and a half years of Jewish war.

Or even in the future, a seven year tribulation or anything like that. As some people think of it. But the tribulation is the whole time that Jerusalem is trampled.

The whole time that the Jews are in distress. And they have been. Terribly so.

Under distress for the whole time since then. Not equally in all places and at all times. But from time to time and place to place, very much so.

And so one could argue that the tribulation began in the Jewish war and has not ended yet. And it will go on until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. That's at least one way to understand the juxtaposition of Matthew 24's reference to the great tribulation.

With Luke 21's description of it. If that is true, then the Gentiles in Revelation 7 who are coming up out of the great tribulation are coming up out of the entire age of the church. These are Christians living and dying faithfully.

Some of them as martyrs, perhaps some of them not. They're not sent to be martyred, but they are dead. They have lived their lives for Christ.

And now they're in heaven. And therefore this could simply represent the number of Gentiles who are saved totally. But the Jewish remnant is saved first.

Paul said that the gospel is to the Jew first. And also to the Greeks. Whenever Paul went even to Gentile cities, he preached first in the synagogues to the Jews.

To get whatever remnant there was of them into the church. And then he'd go to the Gentiles. But we know that historically, in the broad scale, the church was first planted and grew in Jerusalem for many years before any Gentiles were evangelized.

So the first fruits were the Jews saved out of Jerusalem and out of the Jewish community worldwide. And they did survive when the Jewish state went down. But Gentiles in much larger numbers eventually come in.

Well, let's look at chapter 8 then. In chapter 8, verse 1, it says, When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about a half hour. Many have interpreted this in different ways.

It seems very possible that the silence in heaven is the cessation of the cries of the martyrs. Who were shouting with a loud voice, How long, O Lord, before you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? In chapter 6, verse 10. They were crying with a loud voice.

Heaven was rather noisy with this unredressed wrong that's being complained about. But now, that wrong is being redressed. Now the judgment has begun, if not been completed.

It's hard to know whether in the sixth seal we're supposed to see the end of the cycle. And we'll now see another cycle which parallels it. That's how many people understand it.

Others feel that the seven trumpets we're about to encounter are somewhat contained in the seventh seal. And when the seventh seal is broken, then new disasters come. It's hard to know whether the seals and the trumpets are parallel to each other or sequential to each other.

But it doesn't really matter. The point is that they are all giving different impressions and aspects of the judgment that's coming upon Jerusalem. And we'll see that this is so as we look at these one by one.

But the silence in heaven could mean that the martyrs are no longer crying out, How long, O Lord, before you do that? Because he's doing it. And so heaven's not noisy at the moment. It's silent for a little while.

Others feel that this silence being only for a half hour is a pregnant silence, like a calm before the storm. There's greater judgments about to be described. And before, just there's a dramatic silence to more or less call attention to the awesomeness of the moment.

In any case, after this half hour of silence, in verse 2 it says, I saw the seven angels who stand before God. And to them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar.

And he was given much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth.

And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven angels, who had the seven trumpets, prepared themselves to sound, and were about to see it. Now, as with the seven-sealed book, before we actually see seals broken, we see a heavenly vision.

It was in chapters 4 and 5, where John was caught up into heaven, and he saw the throne, and the throne attendants, and he saw the book in the hand, the scroll in the hand of him on the throne, and then the question, who can break these seals, and then Jesus shows up, and then there's all this worship. That heavenly vision sets the stage for the seven seals being broken. Now, as we're about to hear the seven trumpets sound, there's a heavenly vision to set the stage for that.

It's more or less explanatory of what's going to happen. Now, the seven trumpets call to mind Jericho. In Joshua chapter 6 and verse 4, God told Israel that when they would go against Jericho, they would have seven priests with seven trumpets.

And they'd march around the city one time a day for seven days, but on the seventh day, they'd march around seven times. And on the seventh time, the priests would blow the seven trumpets. And what would happen? The walls would come down.

The judgment on Jericho would be complete. So, the sounding of seven trumpets for judgment, I think, deliberately calls to mind the story of Jericho. And if the recipient of God's judgment here is, in fact, Jerusalem, then Jerusalem is being likened to Jericho, just as Jerusalem is likened to Sodom and Egypt and Babylon in other parts of the book.

So that many pagan nations and the judgment upon them in the Old Testament provide the imagery for the judgment on Jerusalem, which has become another Sodom, another Egypt, another Babylon, another Jericho. Jericho was the first Canaanite city that Israel had to conquer when they came into the land, like Sodom. It was a city of Canaan, though Sodom was destroyed by direct intervention by God before Joshua's time.

Joshua and his people had to conquer the other Canaanite cities, and they were very corrupt, very corrupt cities. And God supernaturally caused the walls to fall down when the trumpets sounded and the people shouted. And this, no doubt, is imagery that's supposed to remind us of that.

We're now seeing another Jericho about to fall. And before the trumpets sound, we see the angels appear at the trumpets, and in verse 6 they get ready to sound. But in between their appearance in verse 2 and their preparation to sound in verse 6, we have this little drama, where an angel is carrying an incense burner, and he offers incense before the Lord with the prayers of the saints.

Now, it's interesting that the incense was mixed with the prayers of the saints, and the incense with the prayers of the saints went up before God in the smoke, so that the prayers of the saints were offered with the favorable aroma that's pleasing to God. What's strange about that is that in chapter 5 and verse 8, we had similar imagery, but slightly different in a significant way. In chapter 5, verse 8, it says, Now when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

So, these bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints. And it's the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures that have them in chapter 5, verse 8. But here, an angel has one censer and is offering incense with the prayers of the saints. I don't know why the change in the metaphor, but in any case, both 5, 8, and this passage in chapter 8, verses 3 through 5, tell us that the prayers of the saints are presented to God's nostrils as a sweet-smelling aroma.

These prayers are, you know, it's not literal, but it's pictured as if the prayers of the saints have been collected in heaven and they're all being presented to God at one time. What prayers? Well, the result is that the same incense burner that sent the incense and prayers up is taking coals from the altar in the same burner, and those coals are cast on the earth, and fire then comes on the earth, and earthquakes and lightnings and thunders. These are things, of course, that are just images of judgment in general, but the interesting thing is that judgment comes from the same incense burner that offered the prayers, which is no doubt intended to suggest a connection between the prayers and the results.

These were prayers like those of the martyrs under the altar. How long before you avenge our blood on those who dwell in the land? Those prayers are offered up to God, and the same agent that sends the prayers up sends down the judgment in response to the prayers. There's an uncomfortable reality in Scripture, it's uncomfortable for us, that there is a legitimacy

assumed in both the Old and the New Testament of praying for judgment on the wicked.

Now we say, but we're supposed to love our enemies and bless those who curse us. Well, that is true, that we are not to bear any personal grudge toward anyone, even if they harm us. But there's more than just us as individuals, there's the work of God, there's the kingdom of God, and those that oppose and would destroy the work of the kingdom of God, part of our warfare apparently is praying against them.

If you look at 2 Timothy 4.16, Paul says, At my first defense, no one stood with me, but all forsook me, may it not be charged against them. This was his friends, when he stood before Nero on trial for his life, everyone was afraid to stand with him, all his friends forsook him, a bunch of cowards. But he bears them no malice, he says, may it not be charged against them.

It's a little like Stephen saying, Lord, don't lay this sin to their charge. Or like Jesus saying, Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing. These people who basically betrayed Paul, he wishes no malice, he wishes no ill upon them.

But look at verses 14 and 15, he says, Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm, may the Lord repay him according to his works. That doesn't sound very nice. If the man's doing bad things and God rewards him according to his works, it's going to be a bad reward.

It's going to be judgment. He's praying for Alexander to be judged by God. But why? Why is Alexander judged by God in Paul's prayers, but his friends who betrayed him are not? He intercedes for them, not that God won't hold it against him.

Well, verse 15 tells us, You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words. Alexander is resisting the gospel. Alexander is trying to snuff out the message of Christ's kingdom in his town.

And Paul sees him as an enemy, not of Paul, but of the gospel and of the words that Paul's preaching. So he wishes for God to avenge his own words. It's not Paul who wants people who hurt him to get hurt.

He wants people who are opposing Christ to be stopped. And all people will be eventually. Alexander the coppersmith would certainly die at any point someday.

But Paul apparently is wanting something to happen to him sooner rather than later. So that he would stop resisting the gospel. And no doubt Paul would love it if the man was converted.

But if not, he hopes that God will reward him according to his words. Those who hurt Paul, Paul had no animosity toward them. David was the same way.

Many of the Psalms that David prayed were wishing evil on people who forsook God's laws, who resisted God, who persecuted the righteous, who oppressed the poor. David often wished some very ugly things on them in his Psalms. But when it came to people who were hurting

him, like Absalom or Saul, he had no malice at all toward them.

When Absalom tried to kill him and got himself killed instead, David wept for him. When Saul was trying to kill David and got himself killed instead, David wept for him. David did not have any malice toward those who were his personal enemies.

But when people were opposing God, he was on God's side. And his prayers, not his actions necessarily, but his prayers were mobilized as weapons against the enemies of the gospel. Notice neither Jesus nor David nor Paul set about to avenge themselves.

David had the opportunity to kill Saul twice. Saul was at his mercy and David wouldn't do it. And although David did fight the wars of the Lord, the Bible says that.

I think it was Abigail that said to him that you fight the wars of the Lord. David didn't fight his own wars, he fought God's wars. But when it came to his own personal enemies, he wouldn't kill them.

He wouldn't wish them ill. It's possible to love your enemies, but have very harsh things to pray about those who are God's enemies. Look what David said in Psalm 139.

Look at Psalm 139, how he prays. In verse 19, David says, Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God. Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men.

For they speak against you wickedly. Not, they speak against me, God. Kill them.

No, he says, Lord, slay those wicked, bloodthirsty men. Because they're speaking against you wickedly. Your enemies take your name in vain.

It's not that they're opposing David, they're taking God's name in vain. That's what David can't tolerate. He says, Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate you? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred.

I count them my enemies. Notice that last line. They aren't my enemies, they're your enemies.

But I count them my enemies. I'm on your side. God, if you are at war and they're at war against you, I'm on your side.

They're my enemies if they're your enemies. Now, notice he's not talking about those who are trying to kill David. There were plenty of people trying to kill David.

But those who are taking God's name in vain, those who hated the Lord, those who speak wickedly against God, those are the ones David says, I make them my enemies. I hate them with perfect hatred. There must be a perfect hatred.

And likewise, the saints in heaven are praying, Lord, how long before you avenge our blood? There is a legitimacy to praying for God to settle scores. After all, God is concerned about

justice. We don't hate our enemies.

We'd better not hate our enemies. They're also not like Christ. But we can certainly wish that the game would be over soon.

We can certainly wish that those that are dragging out this resistance to the kingdom of God, that they'd be soon removed. They're going to be removed eventually anyway. Why not sooner rather than later? That's really what the attitude seems to be.

And if you look at Luke chapter 18, at the beginning, it says, Then he spoke a parable to them, that men ought always to pray and not to lose heart, saying, There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in the city, and she came to him saying, Avenge me of my adversary. And he would not do it for a while, but afterward he said within himself, Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

Now that's the end of the parable. Jesus now makes the application. Verse 6, Then the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge said, And shall God not avenge his own elect who cry out day and night to him, though he bears long with them? God's elect cry out day and night for vengeance, and God will avenge them.

There is apparently a function of spiritual warfare in prayer that involves asking God to settle the scores with his enemies and to get those people who are killing our brothers and sisters off our backs. Now we have to endure until he does so, like the people who were in heaven and said, How long, Lord? A little longer. Just be patient.

There's more martyrs to be made, but when that's done, then the vengeance will be there. God said he will avenge. Paul said, Brethren, do not avenge yourselves, but give place to wrath, because God has said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay it.

That's in Romans chapter 12. Romans chapter 12, verse 19. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves.

Why? Because someone else is going to avenge you. Give place to wrath. It is written, Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay.

God said he'll avenge. You don't avenge yourselves. That is why we can't turn the other cheek.

That is why we can do good to those who persecute us. That's why we can bless those who curse us. Because it's not like we're just going to be sitting ducks, and they're going to walk all over us.

God will avenge. And so Paul says there in Romans 12, verse 20, Therefore, if your enemy hungers, feed him. If your enemy thirsts, give him a drink.

You're treating your enemy kindly. That's the Christian thing to do. But in so doing, he coals a fire on his head.

That is, the judgment is accumulating for him. And so, to pray that God will, in his time, judge the wicked, so that the righteousness can fill the earth. That is, after all, what we are praying for when we say, Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

How can God's kingdom come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven, except at the expense of those who resist it? They either have to convert, or they have to be mowed down. That's just what God's going to have to do. And we pray for that every time we pray, as Jesus taught us to pray.

It's, like I say, a disconcerting aspect of prayer, because we don't hold any ill will toward them as people. We would prefer that they be saved, and we'd rejoice if they did. But there's this larger campaign between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God.

And we're on the side of the kingdom of God. And those that are on the side of the kingdom of darkness and want to stop God, well, we mobilize God through our prayers. Now, what we see in Revelation 8, then, is these prayers are going up, and from those prayers, there comes judgment down.

I believe that we are seeing God answering the prayers of those martyrs again, from another angle, and their prayers have gone up, and the vengeance is coming down from God, not from them. Christians don't avenge themselves. Now, it takes the form of seven trumpet judgments, four of which are in chapter 8, and two are elaborated on at length in chapter 9, so that we get, by the end of chapter 9, we've got six of the seven down.

And it says in verse 7, The first angel sounded, and hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. Then the second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. Then the third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the waters, and on the springs of water.

And the name of the star is Wormwood, which means bitterness. And a third of the waters became Wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter. Then the fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were all darkened, and a third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.

And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, or the land, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels that are about to sound. Now, woe, woe, woe, there's one for each of those trumpets. After the next one sounds, we will find, for example, in verse 12 of the next chapter, one woe is past, behold, still more two woes are coming.

So, the last three trumpets are three woes. They are more intense than the first four trumpets. But we have the first four here, and the trumpets then are a little bit like the seals in this respect.

The first four seals were set off from the last three in some way. The first four seals each involved a horseman. The last three didn't.

So, the first four trumpets are set off from the last three in that the last three are called woes. They apparently are more extremely severe. But with reference to these first four, what are we seeing here? We're seeing, first of all, these trumpets affect a third of everything they affect.

Now, a third is not to be understood as a statistic, in my opinion. You'll find that in the Old Testament, a third is sometimes used to simply mean a division of something. I take it to mean a significant minority of something.

For example, in Ezekiel chapter 5, Ezekiel is told that he cuts off his hair, he divides it into three batches, and he treats it differently. Each batch is going to be different. He's going to burn some of it, he's going to cut up some of it with a sword, and a third of it he's going to throw into the wind.

A literal third? I don't know. I think he actually measured it out. To do that with one third.

But in verse 12, God's describing, this is what's going to happen in Jerusalem. He says, One third of you shall die of pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst. And one third shall fall by the sword all around you.

And I will scatter another third to all the winds, and will draw out a sword after them. This is, of course, when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. These three different faiths met the people there.

God talks as if it's a neat division. A third go here, a third die, a third go there. And in all likelihood, it just means there's three different categories, and some are in each category, not literally a statistical third, just a portion of them.

One third is obviously less than half, and therefore it's a minority. But it's the largest whole fraction, less than a half, so it's not a small minority, it's a significant minority. Over in Zechariah chapter 13, there is a prophecy, I believe, about the destruction of Jerusalem and the saving of the remnant from that destruction.

And it's talked about this way, in Zechariah 13, 8 and 9. It shall come to pass in the land, says the Lord, that two-thirds of it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it. That is, there'll be a surviving third when two-thirds of the people are killed. And I will bring the one-third through the fire.

I will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. Like Peter said, the

believers were being tested by fiery trials as gold is tested. They will call on my name, I'll answer them, I will say, this is my people, and each one will say, Lord is my God.

Now, he's saying, in the judgment of Jerusalem, he said two-thirds would die, and one-third would be preserved as a faithful remnant. I seriously doubt if one-third is an exact fraction of how many people were in the remnant. It's not necessary to think so.

This is simply saying the majority will die. A significant minority will be preserved as a remnant. And likewise with Revelation, these visions are very impressionistic.

When people try to make them quite literal, they often go into strange interpretations. Now, there are some ways in which there is a literal fulfillment of some of the features, that is to say, you can find it. Whether it's intended that way or not is hard to say.

When it says in the first trumpet that a third of the trees were burned up and the grass was burned up, some interpreters make the trees and the grass to be people of certain designations. It is possible that this is simply talking about the fact that trees were destroyed in large numbers during the siege of Jerusalem because the Romans needed the wood to build their siege, which they cut down all the trees around there. And Josephus tells us that.

Now, whether this is talking about that or not is anyone's guess. But just for your interest, Josephus in his Wars of the Jews in Book 6, Chapter 1, Paragraph 1, Josephus wrote this, And now the Romans, although they were greatly distressed in getting together their materials, raised their banks in one and twenty days, after they had cut down all the trees that were in the country, that had joined to the city. And that for ninety furlongs round about, as I have already related.

And truly the very view itself of the country was a melancholy thing. For those places which once before were adorned with trees and pleasant gardens were now become a desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down. Nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change.

For the war had laid all signs of beauty quite waste, says Josephus. This is when the Romans were besieging the city. All the trees within, what did he say, ninety furlongs of the city, were gone.

Not all the trees in the whole country were gone, but around the city of Jerusalem all were gone. So what had been once a garden spot was now waste and desert. It was defoliating.

And so this first trumpet that speaks of the burning up of a third of the trees and of the grass might even refer to that. That would be a significant thing. It's not just aesthetics involved.

Trees are the life of a community in many cases, especially in the Middle East. In the desert regions it takes a long time to grow trees and you need them. So this was a great disaster and it

would leave the country in bad shape for years to come.

The second angel sounded, verse 8, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea and a third of the sea became blood. A third of the living creatures in the sea died and a third of the ships were destroyed. Now, again, I don't know to what degree the literal fulfillment of this is to be implied, but there is a rather literal fulfillment of this that Josephus relates.

And it's interesting because he's talking in The Wars of the Jews, Book 3, Chapter 10, and Paragraph 9, Josephus is describing a war that happened in Galilee where the Romans chased the Galileans into small boats on the Sea of Galilee and the people fled from the Romans at sea. However, the Romans pursued them in small boats so there's this maritime battle out on the Sea of Galilee and it went very badly for the Jews. The Romans were just picking them off like sitting ducks, literally.

And Josephus relates it in this way. Let me just read what he says about this awful thing. He says, As for such as were drowning in the sea, this is when the Romans were shooting them out of their boats and stuff with arrows.

As for such as were drowning in the sea, if they lifted their heads up above the water they were either killed by arrows or caught by the vessels. But if, in the desperate case they were in, they attempted to swim to their enemies, the Romans cut off either their heads or their hands and indeed they were destroyed after various matters everywhere till the rest, being put to flight, were forced to get up on land while the vessels encompassed them about on the sea. But as many of these were repulsed when they were getting ashore, they were killed by the darts or the arrows upon the lake.

There were as many killed going ashore as there were killed on the lake. And the Romans leaped out of their vessels and destroyed a great many more upon the land. One might see the lake all bloody and full of dead bodies, for not one of them escaped, and a terrible stink, and a very sad sight there on the following days over the country.

For as for the shores, they were full of shipwrecks and of dead bodies, all swelled. And as the dead bodies were inflamed by the sun and putrefied, they corrupted the air insomuch that the misery was not only the object of commiseration to the Jews but to those who hated them and had been the authors of that misery. As it was so ghastly that even the Romans felt awful about it afterwards.

But notice the sea of Galilee looked all bloody and the shore was full of shipwrecks and so forth in this description. The sea became blood and living creatures in the sea died. A third of the ships were destroyed.

This could be actually referring to something like that. Though there's more symbolism than that in this. Because he sees a great mountain burning with fire thrown into the sea.

What is that about? The sea turns to blood because a great mountain burning with fire is thrown into the sea. Well, mountain being thrown into the sea is an image that Jesus talked about. And it's interesting the connection in which he did.

If you look at Mark chapter 11 verses 20 through 24. Mark 11, 20. It says, Now in the morning as they passed by they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

Jesus had cursed it the day before. He said, No one will ever eat fruit from you again. Most commentators believe that the fig tree is a symbol of Israel.

Unfruitful and therefore given no more opportunity in the future to bear the fruit. And Peter remembering said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree which you cursed has withered away. So Jesus answered and said to him, Have faith in God.

For surely I say to you, whoever says to this mountain. Now he didn't say to a mountain, but this mountain. Where was it? They were ascending the slopes of Mount Zion to the city of Jerusalem.

He's talking about Jerusalem here. Whoever says to this mountain, be removed and be cast into the sea and does not doubt in his heart but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatsoever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them.

Now in connection with the fig tree being cursed, which was an emblem apparently of the impending judgment on Jerusalem, Jesus gave this little illustration. You could say to this mountain, be cast into the sea. The sea is an emblem for the Gentile world in prophecy.

This mountain being Jerusalem. For the population of Jerusalem to be cast into the sea would be for them to be dispersed into the Gentile lands. Now it might not sound like Jesus is saying something very nice here if he's saying that his disciples should pray for the downfall of Jerusalem.

But remember the woman who cried to the judge, avenge me. The disciples were persecuted and many of them were killed by the Sanhedrin's orders. And Jerusalem was the persecutor of the church.

And like those in heaven who say, Lord, how long before you avenge our blood on those who dwell on the land? Jesus assumed that his disciples would be praying for the writing of this Rome. And the writing of this Rome would mean this mountain being cast into the sea. Remember, these things in chapter 8 of Revelation are happening because prayers have gone up and judgments have come down in response to those prayers.

And now we see a mountain being cast into the sea, aflame, it's on fire, it's under judgment. And it's thrown into the sea. This symbolically seems to be a picture of Jerusalem being fallen and the Jews being scattered to the Gentile world.

But along with it we have this seemingly almost literal anecdote of this horrible battle at sea. Maybe one or both of these meanings attach. We can't say for sure.

Now, the third trumpet, verse 10, Then the third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. And the name of the star was Wormwood, and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water as it was made bitter. Well, no doubt there is some literal truth to this in the war because, of course, fresh water sources are often polluted by, well, dead bodies.

For one thing, Josephus described all those putrefying bodies on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee provided the waters for the Jordan River moving south from there. There would be, no doubt, many occasions for the water sources to become polluted in such a massive war in such a small area.

But I think this is symbolic, too. I mean, there may be literal correspondence, but I believe the description has symbolic value. The fresh water is turning into bitter water.

If you look back at Exodus chapter 15, I believe we'll find perhaps the words that God spoke that are relevant to this. In Exodus chapter 15, right after the Jews came out of it, after Israel came out of Egypt, immediately after the Exodus, they came to a place where they needed water, and the water was not drinkable because it was bitter water. And we read about it in Exodus 15.22, so Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur, and they went three days into the wilderness, and they found no water.

Now when they came to Marah, which is Hebrew for bitter, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter, therefore the name of it is called Marah. Someone before they got there discovered the water was bitter and called it Marah, or else they named it Marah as a result of having come there. In any case, the place is called Marah because it means bitter and the water was bitter, not drinkable.

And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree, and when he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There he made a statute and ordinance for them, and there he tested them, and said, If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in his sight, give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you. Now, this is very important.

We have Moses throwing a tree into the waters that are bitter, and they become fresh water, they become sweet. In the vision in Revelation 8-10, something like a burning torch is thrown into the waters, and the fresh waters turn bitter. There's something of a reversal of this miracle, so to speak.

But what is the meaning of the miracle? If we know the meaning of the miracle in Exodus 15,

then we can make some sense of the meaning of the curse that comes in the third trumpet. Bitterness is a symbol for the Egyptian bondage. The Jews accept this fact.

At Passover, they have bitter herbs on the table. When the child asks, why do we have these bitter herbs? The father is supposed to say, it reminds us of the bitter bondage we had in Egypt. It was a bitter thing to be in bondage for those hundreds of years.

And God, by delivering them, healed them like he healed the waters of Mara. He says, I am the Lord, your healer. I brought you out of Egypt.

Now, your bitter condition has been reversed. You're not in Egypt anymore. You're not slaves anymore.

You're free. Your bitter waters have turned sweet. And yet, he says, there's conditions upon this.

We saw in Exodus 15, 26, if you diligently heed the voice of the Lord, your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases on you which I brought on the Egyptians. None of the plagues of Egypt would come upon them if they were obedient. What do we see in the book of Revelation? The plagues of Egypt coming on them.

Why? Because they didn't keep the covenant. They didn't obey. And it says, for I am the Lord who heals you.

God healed their circumstances from being bitter to sweet. He healed the waters of Mara. He turned them from bitter to sweet.

And the change in the waters from bitter to sweet was an emblem of him bringing them out of Egypt and keeping them from the plagues of Egypt. And so he says on this occasion, if you continue to be obedient to me, then I will continue to spare you. I will not bring the plagues, the diseases that I brought on to the Egyptians on you.

Now, it's very obvious that in Revelation, the opposite is happening. The plagues of Egypt are coming on them because they haven't been obedient. And their fresh water is turning bitter again.

It's very symbolic. No doubt literally this happened. Probably water did turn bitter and not potable and it was dangerous to drink.

But the very phenomenon of the water turning bitter again is the reversal of what happened at Mara. And the meaning is the reversal. God had delivered them from Egypt.

That was turning the bitter waters sweet. Now, he's bringing them back into well, they become in Egypt. They're no longer going to have their sweet waters.

They're going to be made bitter again, unfortunately. Then, the last of these in verse 12, Revelation 8.12 Then the fourth angel sounded and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, a third of the stars so that a third of them were darkened and a third of the day did not shine and likewise the night. And I looked and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven saying with a loud voice Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who were about to sound.

We won't take those tonight. But this fourth trumpet like the others affected a third of everything. And this time it was the luminaries in the sky darkened them a third of the time.

Some people who try to make this a future tribulation they say well maybe this is pollution. It kind of cuts out a third of the light of the sun when it starts to reach us. But this is not cutting out a third of the light.

It's cutting off all light for a third of the day. And all the light for a third of the night. It was a third of the day they didn't shine and a third of the night they didn't shine.

So it's not really anything natural. This is symbolic. What's it symbolic of? Well, we've seen in the Old Testament that we've even seen already in Revelation chapter 6 the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars is a representation of disaster.

Of downfall. Of a kingdom. When Babylon fell in Isaiah 13 the sun, moon, and stars went dark according to Isaiah 13 10.

When Egypt was conquered by Babylon the sun, moon, and stars were darkened over Egypt according to Ezekiel 32. When Edom was judged in Isaiah 34, the heavens were rolled up like a scroll. And the stars fell from heaven and the sun was darkened like sackcloth.

In other words, the darkening of the sun and the collapse of the cosmos are images used of utter destruction of a nation. This is not the utter destruction. This is partial destruction.

The lights are going dim, but so far it's only part way. It's only a third. Now, when we come to the bowls of wrath in chapter 16, the same domains are affected by the bowls.

Except they turn all the sea to blood, not a third of it. They turn all the waters undrinkable. They turn they affect the whole of the cosmos.

The whole of everything. And some have said that the difference between the trumpets and the bowls, I mean the obvious difference is the trumpets affect one third, the bowls affect the whole. And some say the significance of that is that the trumpets represent the early stages of judgment which still allow opportunity to repent.

It's like a warning shot. God is doing disastrous things to these people but it's supposed to make them wise up and repent. And we're going to see that after the sixth trumpet sounds at the end of chapter 9. We won't take it of course now, but at the end of chapter 9, verse 20, but

the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues did not repent.

And in verse 21, and they did not repent of their murders, their sorceries, their sexual immorality, or their thefts. Although these things were happening, they didn't repent, which sounds like the purpose of these was to induce them to repent, but they didn't. So that these are the preliminary disasters, or what Jesus said, the beginning of birth pangs.

These are just the beginning of sorrows. This is not the end yet. But it is a protracted war that had many ugly scenes.

And the scenes that are described here are somewhat symbolic. It's like God judging a Canaanite city of Jericho, only now it's Jerusalem. It's like the waters are turning bitter again that were once changed from bitter to sweet for them.

It's like the mountain is now on fire, being thrown into the sea. It's like the sky is darkening, but it's not all the way dark yet. The disaster is not total, but it's nearing, and therefore it is a warning to those who are surviving that they should repent, and it's almost with marvel that John notes at the end of chapter 9, they don't.

Why they would not is amazing to imagine, but part of the reason is going to be seen when the fifth trumpet sounds, and we'll have to hold off for next time about that.

OpenTheo

Revelation 9 - 10

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this section, Steve Gregg continues his exploration of the book of Revelation with chapters 9 and 10. After the interlude in chapter 7, the sixth and seventh seals are revealed, showing God's salvation of a remnant of Israel and a multitude of Gentiles. The first four horsemen of judgment are shown, with a warning that two more woes are coming. Gregg dives deep into the symbolism and imagery used throughout these chapters, exploring the meaning and significance behind each detail.

Transcript

In our last session, we went through chapters 7 and 8, and we saw that chapter 7 was an interlude between the sixth and the seventh seal. And in chapter 7, the servants of God in Jerusalem, that is the Christian Jews, were sealed by God before the calamities began. And they were sealed so that those calamities might not befall them.

And we saw that this was actually an echo of what Ezekiel saw in a vision in Ezekiel 9, where before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, he saw, as it were, an angel going around with an ink horn and putting marks on the heads of all the inhabitants of Jerusalem who sighed and cried over the abominations done in the city, that is, who had a heart for God and were basically his faithful remnant. They were delivered. The other angels that were seen in that vision in Ezekiel chapter 9 went out with battle axes in their hands and slaughtered everybody who didn't have that mark on their head.

So it was a slaughter in 586 BC when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, but the remnant were spared, and it is emblemized by the fact that God had them marked on their foreheads. So also in chapter 7, God's servants in Jerusalem before the Holocaust of AD 70 are marked the 144,000, and they did, in fact, escape. The Christians in Jerusalem did escape that tragedy.

Then we saw at the end of chapter 7 that there was a great multitude from all nations and peoples and tongues that also were saved. So God not only saved the remnant of Israel, but an overwhelming mass of the Gentiles as well that are seen in heaven glorifying God, who have come out of all of this. And after that interlude in chapter 7, the long-awaited seventh seal is

broken in chapter 8, verse 1, and nothing really happens.

It's like everything is building up. Every one of the seals gets a little worse than the previous one, and then you get to the seventh, and you're expecting the ultimate disaster, and instead there's silence in heaven for a half hour, which perhaps is to be understood as a dramatic tension quiet before the storm, as calm before the storm, as we might say. And then appear these seven angels with seven trumpets.

And there's a vision at the beginning of chapter 8 where there's the prayers of the saints are being offered up with incense before God and entering into his nostrils. And these prayers apparently are bringing about the results that follow because the same incense burner that offers up the prayers then takes coals from the altar and throws them on the earth, implying a continuity between the prayers and the consequences. And then come the seven trumpets, well, we've covered in chapter 8, the first four.

And after the first four trumpets were sounded, an angel was flying through the midst of heaven. And I might just say that in the Alexandrian text, it says an eagle. So if you're looking at something other than the King James or the eagle flying through the midst of heaven, it says in the Texas Receptus, an angel.

I don't suppose it matters too much, but just in case you're looking at another translation, I say, why does he keep saying an angel when it says an eagle? It's a textual variant. But this being flying through heaven in chapter 8 and verse 13 says, woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the land or of the earth because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels, which are about to sound. Now, this is indicating that the next three trumpets, the last three of the series, will be disastrous beyond the scope of the first four.

So much so that they, you know, great pity is to be had for those who experience what is about to take place with the sounding of these last three trumpets. We'll find after the fifth trumpet is blown, it says in chapter 9, verse 12, one woe is past. Behold, two more woes are coming after these things.

And then we're going to see the same thing in chapter 11, verse 14. After the sixth trumpet has been sounded, it says in chapter 11, verse 14, the second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

So each of these last three trumpets is a woe. And that is because they are set off from the first four, apparently by their intensity. Just as when we saw that there were seven seals, the first four were set off from the last three.

The first four had, were each revealed a horse of a different color and a rider and a judgment. So the first four seals were four horses, so-called four horses of the apocalypse. And then the last three seals were different.

In this case, the first four trumpets are passed over with rapidity, but the last three are set off

from them as being unusually intense. And we get much more description, at least of the fifth and the sixth trumpets. Now, chapter 9 is occupied with the fifth and the sixth trumpets.

In chapter 9, verse 1, it says, the fifth angel sounded and I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. And to him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit and smoke arose out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace.

And the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke, locusts came upon the earth or on the land. And to them was given power as the scorpions of the earth have power.

They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth or any green thing or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. And their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man.

In those days, men will seek death and they will not find it. They will desire to die and death will flee from them. And the shape of the locust was like horses prepared for battle.

And on their heads were crowns of something like gold. And their faces were like the faces of men. And they had hair like women's hair.

And their teeth were like lion's teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron. And the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle.

They had tails like scorpions. And there were stings in their tails. And their power was to hurt men five months.

And they had a king over them, the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon. But in Greek, he has the name Apollyon. One woe is past.

Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things. Now this particular vision of the locust has captured the imagination of commentators probably more than any other passage. And of course, the temptation is very great among those who see these events as fulfilled in the future and see it as perhaps a future modern war that is dominating the landscape of the tribulation, this approach of Armageddon and various other modern wars leading up to that, to see these locusts, as they're called, as some kind of military aircraft.

Helicopters usually are the suggestion of choice. The sound of their wings is like many horses running to battle. You know how loud choppers are.

They've got crowns of something like gold. People say, well, you know, John, he's taken off. And he kind of sees this in a vision.

And he doesn't know anything about technology. To him, these just look like locusts. Frankly, they kind of do.

Some helicopters do. I mean, the helicopters come in all shapes. But obviously, some helicopters look almost like dragonflies.

In fact, you wonder if someone who, the first people who designed them, had dragonflies in mind to mimic. They do look like insects from a distance, I suppose, to someone like John. And the crowns of gold, perhaps they were seen off the plexiglass bubble, the reflection of the sun, it was shining like gold.

Their breastplates were like iron. They obviously were metallic. They had faces like men and hair like women.

Difficult to know exactly what the hair like women would be, unless the helmets the pilots are wearing don't look like man's hairstyle or something, and the man's faces are there. There's so many attempts to make this out to be some recognizable military machinery. Or some actually say they are UFOs.

But helicopters are usually what is suggested, even by those commentators who claim that they're taking revelation very literally. It's very common among the dispensationalists. In fact, they are the ones who do this most.

They say that they're taking everything literally, and yet these are not taken literally. They're taken to be aircraft, rather than what they are said to be. What they are said to be is locusts with scorpion tails and these other unusual features.

Some kind of a mutant insect. But obviously, they are symbolic. I don't think they're symbolic of aircraft.

You'll see those who say that they are aircraft are not really taking it symbolically. They're just saying John's seeing something, and he's giving a literal description of what he sees, but he doesn't quite, he mistakes what it is. We would recognize them as helicopters coming in battle array, but he, of course, is unfamiliar with them, so he thinks he's seeing a locust plague.

Now, there are things about this that make it difficult to know how it could be helicopters. For one thing, they don't kill people. Military helicopters usually do.

If they're armed, they usually have missiles, and those don't just torment people for five months and leave them alive. In most cases, they kill just as much as any other kind of military weapon does. They're killing machines, and it's emphatic that they don't kill people.

It's repeated twice. They only torment them for five months. Hard to know how to fit that into the scenario of these being helicopters.

Likewise, they don't destroy any green thing, but helicopters, if they shoot missiles, especially in a kind of jungle warfare, they're going to destroy a lot of green things. There'll be a lot of green things destroyed that way. Also, they don't hurt those who have the seal of God on their

forehead.

Now, these are, of course, the 144,000 who were sealed on their forehead in Chapter 7. They were sealed to be preserved from this kind of thing, and they are kept safe. I suppose we could imagine a time in the future where the saints are in the midst of warfare, missiles are flying, machine guns firing everywhere, but God preserves the Christians. They simply are not in the line of fire, and God keeps them safe.

That's not an unimaginable thing, but generally speaking, military machines kill indiscriminately. Whole towns, populations, neighborhoods, whatever they attack, they don't discriminate between the Christians and the non-Christians among them, and it sounds like these do. These are under direct orders to afflict those who are not Christians, but to leave the Christians alone.

So, what are they? Well, if a dispensationist wanted to be quite literal, they'd have to say they are, in fact, mutant insects. They're locusts with scorpion tails and so forth. Now, we have to remember where they're coming from.

These appear out of the smoke that rises out of what's called the bottomless pit in our translation. In the Greek, it's the abyss, the abysso. This term is sometimes translated the abyss and sometimes the bottomless pit in scripture, but it is the place where demonic powers are incarcerated.

It is the place where later in Revelation 20, we read of Satan, the dragon being bound with a chain and thrown into the abyss, and then later he's released from the abyss. This is apparently a place that stands for the enslavement or the captivity of demons. In fact, in Luke chapter 8, when Jesus encountered the man of the tombs who was inhabited by a legion of demons, they begged him in Luke 8 31 not to send them to the abyss, and he accommodated them, at least momentarily.

Where they went after the pigs died, we don't know. Maybe they went to the abyss then. But the point is the demons saw the abyss as a terrifying prospect for them, a place where he could send them, and they would be apparently trapped there.

We read in both 2 Peter and Jude that the angels who send are kept in chains under darkness awaiting the judgment of the great day. The word abyss is not used in those passages. In fact, in Peter, the word Tartarus is used, but we have no other reference in scripture to any place called Tartarus, and it's not impossible that Tartarus is a name for the abyss.

We will not press that point, but the thing is that there is a place that that Peter calls Tartarus, which is where he said fallen angels are in captivity. But we know that the demons were afraid to be sent to the abyss, the bottomless pit, and they knew Jesus could send them there if he wished. In chapter 11 of Revelation and verse 7, it says that when the two witnesses finish their witness, the beast that ascends out of the abyss will make war against them and come and

overcome them and kill them.

This is the same beast that is seen rising out of the sea in chapter 13, and it is clear that the beast is simply the devil with skin on, because in chapter 12, the devil, the dragon, is described as having seven heads and ten horns and being red, and likewise the beast is described as having seven heads, ten horns, and being red. It's a thin disguise, not easily hidden, that this is the devil embodied in some form. We'll worry about what form that is later, but the beast is said to come out of the bottomless pit, out of the abyss, and as I pointed out, Jesus, or some angel, incarcerated the dragon himself in the bottomless pit in chapter 20 for a while.

So these creatures come out of the abyss. All we know about the abyss is that it's the place where demons are kept, and therefore it would appear to be a release of demons upon the world, or upon whoever the victims are of these visions. Now, I've suggested that when we read the word earth, the better translation in these contexts would be land, and I need to clarify for those of you who haven't heard this discussed before that land is not really a better translation for the Greek word.

It's just an equally good one, that the word in Greek can be translated land or earth with equal justice, because it's the word in Greek for land, and it's the word for earth, same word in the Greek. So the question is, are we talking about things that are happening to the earth, that is the world at large, or to the land, that is the land of Israel? And my suggestion has been that if we translate it as the land, which is something that many commentators believe is the right thing to do, although the translators haven't generally done that, then we're looking at a calamity coming on the land of Israel, and that would be suited to the general theme of the book as I understand it. We're talking about the invasion of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

Now, these locusts are not the Romans, in my opinion. I believe the Romans appear when the sixth trumpet is sounded. This is something that comes and does harm before the Romans do.

You see, in the sixth trumpet, people are going to be killed. This trumpet isn't killing anyone, just tormenting them. This is not the end.

This is just the time that makes people wish it was the end. They desire to die, but they can't. They're looking for it to all come to an end, but it isn't coming to an end yet.

There's five more months of torment. And so, my suggestion is going to be, and I'll give you much to support this, that this is referring to the unleashing of hordes of demons upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the siege. Now, before I ever had any reason to interpret this passage that way, I read Josephus.

I haven't read all of Josephus, but I read enough of Josephus to get a sense of what was going on in the siege of Jerusalem. And I remember thinking, there's no way that intelligent people, and by the way, most Jews I met are intelligent people, would act so crazy as these people

acted. They acted like animals.

They acted like demons. They were just absolutely wicked toward each other and toward themselves, in that they really acted against their own best interests. While they were besieged by the Romans outside, their real enemy, inside, since they felt secure from the Romans, they felt the Romans couldn't get in, they had the leisure to kill each other and to divide into three warring factions in the city and to wage wars inside the city with each other to destroy each other's food supplies when everybody was starving.

I mean, this is just, it's like if anyone had brain one, they would have thought, wait a minute, guys, if we stop killing each other, we might actually survive. But they were crazy. And the details that Josephus records of the things that they did are just so astonishing.

You never read of anything like it. When Jesus said, then shall be great tribulation, such as never was, since the world began, nor ever shall be. When you read Josephus, you can almost believe it.

It's hard to imagine anything that bad ever before or afterward. And he's not writing to confirm anything Jesus said. Josephus didn't even know what Jesus said, or what Revelation said.

He just was there. He just witnessed and did the research and interviewed the people who were there who survived and got the information and wrote as a historian. But he himself said that it was his opinion.

Josephus said it was his opinion that there had never been anything in all of history as astonishing as the behavior of these people during the siege, because they simply did not act like intelligent human beings at all. They acted like wild animals or like demons. And when I was reading Josephus, it occurred to me, it's obvious that demon possession was rampant in the city.

And it was later, but not much later, when I was reading Revelation, I thought, well, hey, duh, we see it right here. One of the judgments that God sent upon them was he opened the bottomless pit and let the demons come out in hordes like a swarm of locusts and torment the people. Now it says for five months, generally speaking, I think that the time designations in Revelation are not usually literal.

And this might not be either. Though it's difficult to know exactly what five months would symbolize, there is a sense in which it could be literal. And that is that the siege of Jerusalem, that is the final siege, because there's more than one, the final siege that resulted in its destruction, and the time when the craziness inside the city was at its worst, began in April of AD 70 and ended at the beginning of September.

It was a five-month period of siege, and it was the worst period of time that Josephus describes. And this could essentially be a literal length of time that these locusts supposedly were, I say supposedly because they weren't really locusts, that they were unleashed and tormented the

people with insanity, really. That was before the Romans came in and physically did them in.

But they were spiritually possessed, spiritually wiped out, before the Romans even got in. And by the way, Josephus often mentions how often the Romans were more compassionate toward these Jews when they saw how miserable their own behavior had made them. Of course, the Romans were not exactly compassionate people in general, but they were so shocked by what they saw in the behavior and the misery, the self-inflicted miseries of the Jews when they came into the city, that Josephus often comments on how the Romans were just almost like, they just had, they felt pity.

They were reluctant to do more harm to these people that had already done so much to themselves. But they got over it. If you turn to Matthew 12, I believe Jesus explains what we're reading here.

Matthew 12. There are many times, I think five or six in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus makes comments about what he calls this generation. And while some people want the word generation to mean a race or a family, when you actually read all the cases where Jesus uses the term this generation, it just doesn't work as race.

The word generation means all the people living at the same time. And for example, Jesus said in chapter 11, we're not looking there, but in chapter 11, Jesus said the people of this generation are like children playing in the streets saying, we piped for you and you wouldn't dance. And we played a dirge for you and you wouldn't mourn.

Now he said, that's what this generation is like. He explained it because John the Baptist came to you and you say he has a demon. He played a dirge and you wouldn't mourn with him.

Then the son of man came eating and drinking and you wouldn't dance with him. You just said he's a wine, bibber, and a glutton, a friend of sinners. Now, Jesus said he was describing that generation.

What generation? The generation that had occasion to react to John the Baptist and Jesus. His own generation is what he's talking about. Likewise, later, of course, we're all familiar with the statement he made in Matthew 24, 34, this generation will not pass until all these things are fulfilled.

And while many people have tried to make that statement mean anything but what it sounds like it means, Jesus did not leave us the option of taking it wrong because in a statement talking about the same details, only less detailed, in Matthew 16, 28, Jesus said, some of you standing here will not taste death before these things happen or before you see the son of man coming in his kingdom. So what is described in Matthew 24 is also spoken of in Matthew 16. In Matthew 24, Jesus says this generation will not pass.

In Matthew 16, he says some of you standing here won't die before this happens. Obviously, he leaves no doubt that when he says this generation will not pass, he means some people living

at that time will not die. There will be people living of his contemporaries.

That generation is his contemporaries. Now, in chapter 12 of Matthew, this is one of the places that Jesus talks about his generation. And it says in verse 43, Matthew 12, 43, when an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest and finds none.

Then he says, I will return to my house from which I came. And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there.

And the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation? That's an unexpected end to that paragraph. Sounds like he's just giving us some information about what happens to demon-possessed people.

Once the demons come out, they tend to want to come back and bring friends with them. And he's talking about a man. When a demon goes out of a man, the demon goes out and comes back and inhabits that man.

And the state of that man is worse than the first state. He's talking about an individual and his problems with demon possession. But then he says, and that's what this generation is going to be like.

That's how it'll be with this generation. What? This generation will be like a man who had a demonic problem that Jesus cured, but did not do more than sweep and garnish the house and left the house empty. And the demons came back in force.

Seven means a total number. Seven is the number of completeness. In other words, the man was somewhat demon-possessed when he had a demon.

When the last state came, he was totally demon-possessed. He was totally given over in bondage to demons. Now, this does in fact parallel that generation that Jesus came to.

It's interesting how little we read in the Old Testament about demons. In fact, the term demon, in the sense we read it in the New Testament, doesn't really seem to appear in the Old Testament. We read of evil spirits in the Old Testament.

Same thing. The New Testament also uses the term evil spirits as a synonym for demons. But very little.

We read in the Old Testament of some people having an unclean spirit or an evil spirit, but that's usually God sent an evil spirit against Saul or against the men of Shechem or a lying spirit to the prophets of Ahab. Or we read of someone having a familiar spirit, which usually means they're a medium and they're apparently demon-possessed. Those references in the Old Testament are found very rarely.

But once Jesus comes on the scene, demons are everywhere. You know, it's one of the

peculiarities of the Gospels that suddenly, once Jesus is there, demons are there all over the place. Every time Jesus goes anywhere, he runs into demon-possessed people in the synagogue, in the tombs, out on the streets.

Many times it says, just summary statements in the Gospels, Jesus went about all the villages in Galilee healing all the sick and casting out all the demons. It's almost like demon possession was as matter-of-factly discussed as sickness. You go to town, you cast out the demons and heal the sick.

It's like a major part of Jesus' ministry everywhere he went was casting demons out of people. Yet you don't even find the phenomenon of demon possession much before Jesus arrives. So what happened here? Well, you know, it says in Revelation 12 that when Jesus was about to be born, the dragon was poised to kill the child at his birth, but failed.

It does look like the devil was waiting for Jesus. The devil knew he was coming and was threatened by him and seems to have launched preemptive attacks, like when he tried to get Herod to kill him by having him kill all the babies of Bethlehem. It may well be that Satan also unleashed demons on the population to resist the movement of Jesus at that time too.

We can't be sure, but we do read in Revelation that the devil was definitely mindful of the arrival of Jesus and willing to do everything he could to stop him. It may be that that's why the demons are seen in force in Israel when Jesus shows up, but not before. But what did Jesus do? He cast those demons out.

Everywhere he went, he cast demons out of the people. By the time Jesus left, I don't know if there were very many villages left that Jesus had not cast the demons out. In fact, he had sent his disciples out two by two.

On one occasion, he sent out 12 of them two by two to villages that he wasn't going to make it to, or to villages he was hoping to get to later. Another time, he sent out 70 disciples two by two on a similar mission. In each case, he told them, cast out demons.

Heal the sick. In other words, not only was Jesus going to all the villages casting out all the demons, he had disciples going to all the villages casting out the demons. This was quite an assault on the demonic powers.

In fact, when the 70 came back and reported back in Luke 10 and said, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name. He said, I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven. I think what he's saying is, this is the end for Satan.

This is Satan's downfall here. We're making a major attack on all his villages and throwing out all of his troops. This is the downfall of the enemy.

It was, by the way, Jesus defeated him at the cross. But, he was in the process of defeating him during his ministry. By the time Jesus was done and left, Israel was like a man who had his

demon cast out.

Satan had come in force, but where the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord raises up a standard against him. Satan's forces came like a flood into Israel, and Jesus raised up a standard of opposition to them and overcame them. By the time Jesus' ministry was over, there weren't many demons left in Israel.

You find some in Ephesus. You find them in various places in the book of Acts. Not really in Israel much.

Maybe not at all. Although Satan filled Ananias and Sapphira's heart, that may not be the same thing as demon possession. The point is, Jesus had come and he'd cleaned house.

Like a man who had the demon cast out of him, Israel had been given a second chance to get it right. Now, the demon's gone. You need to fill that space.

You need to embrace Christ. You need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You need to fill that vacuum.

So, God poured out his Holy Spirit on the inhabitants of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Thousands of them received him, but not all. Those who did not still had that vacuum.

Jesus said, this generation is going to be in danger like a man who has the demon cast out of him, but doesn't close that door, doesn't fill that void. The original demon and seven more worse than him are going to come back, and that man's state is going to be totally in bondage to demons, totally possessed. That's what this generation is going to be like.

At the beginning of that generation, Jesus cast out their demons. At the end, the demons came back in a multitude, and you cannot read Josephus with any kind of knowledge of the New Testament or of spiritual realities. There's no one could read it and not conclude that these people were just totally blinded, totally deceived, totally tormented by demonic powers.

And this, I believe, is what Revelation is saying. The fifth trumpet sounds in this innumerable horde, probably. They're not innumerable, said to be, but a locust plague generally is innumerable.

Locust plagues are overwhelming. They come out of the pit, the place where demons are incarcerated. They're let go.

They're unleashed upon the people of the land, and they torment them for five months. Now, we know that we're not talking about real locusts here. In fact, it's almost as if the vision deliberately gives special details, so we'll know we're not talking about regular locusts.

Two things about these locusts are unlike regular locusts. One, it says in verse four, they were commanded not to harm the grass or any green thing or any tree. That's not what locusts are like.

Locusts do little else but damage green things. In fact, they eat everything the green thing in their path. They don't hurt people, but they sure do hurt vegetation.

These are locusts that aren't like regular locusts. They don't hurt the vegetation. They hurt people.

Furthermore, it says specifically in verse 11, they have a king over them. Now, not only do locusts not have a king over them, obviously, but the scripture goes out of its way to point out that locusts do not have a king over them. Over in Proverbs chapter 30, in verse 27, Agur in that chapter says this, the locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks.

He's talking about regular locusts. I mean, lions and tigers and bears don't have any king either, nor do centipedes or birds or anything, but it's interesting that the Bible would go out of its way to mention that locusts don't have any king. Actually, no animals have kings, but that locusts are said to have no king in scripture, and yet these ones are specifically said to have a king.

These ones are ruled over and who are they ruled over by? The demon that opened the pit. I say demon. We don't know that it doesn't say it was a demon, but it's an angel.

It says in verse 1, the fifth angel sounded, I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth, and to him was given a key to the abyss to open it up. Now, I don't know who this star fallen was, although it could be Satan. If he is, he's the one who's said to be the king over them.

The name given for him here is not Satan, but it's given in Hebrew and in Greek, Abaddon, which in Hebrew means destruction, and the Greek word Apollyon, which in Greek means destroyer. These are the alternate names. Interesting that Hebrew and Greek names are given for this, not just the Greek.

The book is written in Greek, not Hebrew. Why give the name in Hebrew and in Greek? It may be in order to tip the readers off that when you read names, you want to not leave out of consideration their Hebrew forms. Why? I'm only guessing, but it is my opinion that 666 is a reference to Caesar Nero's name in a Hebrew form, and John says you who are clever, you who are wise, calculate this, figure this out.

I've given you the hints. The man's name is 666. If, as I suspect, this is a reference to the Hebrew rendering of Caesar Nero, which does total 666, and yet the Latin and the Greek do not, then it is in code so that the Romans, if this book would fall into their hands, would not recognize who's being mentioned there.

The Christians would, especially if they knew Hebrew, which they apparently are expected to know some. There are some Hebrew words scattered throughout the text. Armageddon, for example, is a Hebrew word.

Alleluia, which occurs several times in chapter 19, is a Hebrew word. Abaddon is a Hebrew name. He could have just said the name of the angel is Apollyon, which means essentially the

same thing in Greek, and then it would just be sticking with the language the book is written in.

But by saying, and in Hebrew, his name is kind of the same thing, only in Hebrew, it might be one of the hints that John intends for the wise to take into consideration when they're calculating the name of the beast. Maybe his name should be considered in Hebrew as well. It may be a stretch.

You certainly are not obligated to hold that view, but otherwise we have perhaps unanswered the question, why is this name given in both languages? There may be a better answer. I have not heard one. The star in verse 1 is fallen.

In chapter 10 of the previous chapter, I mean verse 10, chapter 8 verse 10, says, a third angel sounded and a great star fell from heaven. When it comes to the third trumpet, he sees a star falling, but with the fifth trumpet he sees a star fallen. The star has already fallen before he sees it.

It's already sometime in the past fallen. And then he simply sees a fallen star doing something, opening a pit and letting these things out to torment people. That may suggest it is Satan.

By fallen, we might think of him as a fallen angel. That may be the correct way to look at him, but that's not necessarily implied. If this is Satan, he could have fallen in the sense that Jesus said.

I see Satan falling like lightning from heaven. This was taking place during Jesus' ministry and accomplished essentially at the cross. In Revelation 12, verses 7 through 9, we see this war in heaven where the dragon is cast out of heaven to the earth.

That's not the end of his career because they say, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because the dragon has come down to you having great wrath and he knows his time is short. Satan, as the book of Revelation 12 and John chapter 12, verse 31, suggests, was cast out of heaven at the cross. And therefore, at the time of 70 AD, he was fallen.

He had lost his position. It specifically says a star fallen from heaven to the earth. That's what Jesus said.

I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven. So this could be a reference to Satan. The name destroyer may simply be a nickname for him like Beelzebub is apparently in Matthew 12 where there's reference to Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.

Here, this is the king of the demons. King, prince, could be the same character. Or not.

It would be clear that if these locusts are demons and they're under a king named Apollyon, that king named Apollyon is either the devil himself or some lesser ranking official in the devil's hierarchy, under Satan. It doesn't matter too much. But the fact that he's a fallen star and the fact that we know that Satan is said to have fallen may be a hint.

Now, before the locusts were seen, a great pillar of smoke came out of the pit which darkened the sky. Then he saw out of the smoke these locusts came. As it was made clear, they could not hurt the Christians.

They could torment men but not those who had the seal of God. The Christians have immunity. The Christians were not present at this invasion.

The Christians actually had escaped from Jerusalem. Christians in general have authority over demons. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world, John said in 1 John 4. Jesus said in Luke chapter 10 verse 19, he said, Behold, I give you authority over serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

He's talking to his disciples. Power over serpents and scorpions. Here we have scorpion stings attached to these locusts.

The next vision, the sixth trumpet, there are horses that have biting serpents for tails. It's figurative, of course, but the point is you've got the imagery of scorpions and serpents. And Jesus said to his disciples, I give you authority over serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy.

He indicates that scorpions and serpents are examples of the power of the enemy. That is the power of Satan. And he said nothing shall by any means hurt you.

So these images of serpents and scorpions, no doubt, are demonic images. And the locusts, they're described as locusts because of the amounts of them, because there's so many of them coming out of smoke. He could have just said scorpions were unleashed, but scorpions are usually rather solitary animals.

And you'd think maybe a scorpion or two might be seen. But when you talk about a locust plague, you're talking about the whole sky being dark. Locusts come in the millions, tens of millions at a time.

And when there is an actual locust plague, the sky is literally dark because the thick clouds of locusts. It's a terrifying prospect. Anyone living in an agrarian land knows that you cannot stop a locust plague.

You can step on a locust, you can squish them, but when there's 100 million of them and they have only one thing in mind, and that's to eat all your crops, you're doomed. It's the end for you. You cannot resist this.

And I think the reference to them being locusts suggests they're great numbers. The fact that they have a sting like scorpions suggests that they torment people and that they are demonic, like scorpions. Scorpions sometimes have a sting that's bad enough to kill people, but not generally.

Most scorpions just make you really hurt bad. They say that when the Roman armies invaded Carthage in North Africa, the scorpions there, their stings were so great that although Roman soldiers were taught not to flinch, even when they're in fighting and when they get stabbed or sliced by swords, they didn't flinch. That's how they're trained.

But it says that when they got stung by the scorpions in North Africa, they wept. The Roman soldiers wept. The pain was so intense.

They didn't die. That's how scorpions were in that region. The pain is just intolerable.

So it is a torment to be greatly feared and dreaded, and enough to make you wish you were dead. But scorpions don't generally kill people. In verse 6 where it says, In those days men will seek death, and they will not find it.

They will desire to die, and death will flee from them. I believe this is more or less impressionistic rather than that they really would not be able to die if they really set their minds to it. The teacher I was raised under who was a futurist and thought this was talking about a future tribulation thought that imagine a time when you want to die but nothing you do can end your life.

He says, Imagine shooting yourself in the head with a gun and still living. He said, You have no brains, but you'd still be alive. You can't die.

Well, that's kind of taking these words a little more literally than I think it's intended. I don't think it's saying that it'll be impossible to die, that you couldn't just jump headlong off the wall of Jerusalem and have your head cracked open and brain splattered, but you'd still be alive. That's not what it's talking about.

It's saying that things would be so bad that although most people don't have it in them to kill themselves, they could wish that their life would end, but it's not that easy. It's not that soon. It's not yet time.

They are tormented for five months before the actual invasion of the armies comes through the walls and kills them. They'd rather die sooner if they could. Now, the description of the locust in verses 7 and following is interesting.

It may be that the individual details have symbolic value, or it may just be painting a really scary picture, but it says they were like horses prepared for battle, which suggests they're warlike, and we are. The demons are warlike. We are waging a war.

We are wrestling against principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this age and spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places, Paul said in Ephesians 6. There is a war going on. These are like an army to be fought, but the people of Jerusalem would not have the resources to fight them because they've rejected Christ, and he alone has the power to ward them off. It says, on their heads were crowns of something like gold.

It's interesting when the 24 elders were described in chapter 4, it said they had crowns of gold on their heads, but these have crowns of something like gold. It's not gold. It's artificial.

It's foil or something. It looks like gold. It sparkles like gold, but not all that sparkles is in fact gold.

Not all that glistens is gold, and their crowns glisten, but they didn't have real authority. A real crown of gold suggests you're a king. You're a real authority.

These don't have real authority. They may be an illegitimate authority. They're not really crowned and authentic.

Jesus alone has all authority in heaven and earth. The devil doesn't have any authority, but he'll exert authority if he can fool people. If people are blind and don't know about Christ, they'll submit to Satan and to his demons.

They have what looks like a crown of gold, but the wording suggests strongly it's not real. It's not real gold. It's something like gold.

Their faces were like the faces of men. In all likelihood, having human faces suggests that they were intelligent. Now I realize some of you women might not think that a man is the best example of intelligence that could be thought of, but of course this is in contrast to locusts, not to women.

Compared to locusts, men are considerably more rational, and demons are rational creatures. They're not just locusts. They're not just creatures acting on instinct.

Their faces have intelligence. They are human-like in that they can think, and they are rational creatures, beings. Now their hair is like the hair of women.

Now you have to understand what this would mean to a Semitic mind. In Israel, women of course had very long hair, although they usually kept it hidden. They usually kept it up and covered.

If a woman's hair was down, it was considered that she was being much too casual, much too familiar. A woman with her hair down in public, invisible, would probably be considered to be a little too improper, maybe a little seductive. Men are attracted to women's long hair, and it may be that these are seductive spirits, like women with their hair down.

They have the hair like women, which seduces people spiritually. Not that anyone really seen a demon would find them sexually attractive. The imagery is simply trying to get across something else.

I think namely that as a woman with her hair down might be considered to be a seductress, so these demons are seducing spirits. They have teeth like lion's teeth. They're ferocious, and they don't actually eat people, because they don't kill people.

I guess just as their torment is like a sting of a scorpion, perhaps it's like the biting of a predator. They have breastplates like breastplates of iron. I suppose the lion's teeth may be intended to call to mind Satan, especially if 1 Peter had already been written before Revelation, because Peter says, be vigilant, be sober.

Your adversary, Satan, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The lion's teeth are for devouring things, and Satan may be seeking to devour these people. Therefore, the demons are said to have teeth like a lion.

The breastplates of iron would suggest they're invincible. Most soldiers didn't have such strong breastplates as that. They'd be very expensive and heavy to wear, but if somebody had an iron breastplate, the weapons of that day would hardly be able to penetrate, and therefore they'd be somewhat invincible, like someone with Kevlar today, and a day before they had armor-piercing bullets.

So their breastplates like iron would seem to mean that they cannot be defeated by human means. They are like war horses coming in, but you can't fight them. You can't defeat them.

Man does not have the resources within him to overcome Satan's power or the demons. So they torment people for five months, and they are following the king, who is probably Satan, which again suggests they are the demonic hordes under the command of Satan. This horrendous five-month period is what he sees as the first woe.

One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things. Now, I don't have as much to say about the details of the next trumpet, but I do believe that we can identify what it's referring to.

In verse 13, Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar, which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, Release the four angels who are bound at the great Euphrates River. So the four angels who had been prepared for the hour and the day and the month and the year were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million, and I heard the number of them.

And thus I saw horses in the vision. Those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow, and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions. And out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.

Out of these three plagues, or by these three plagues, a third of mankind was killed by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents having heads, and with them they do harm. But the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.

And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. Now this last verse makes it very clear that these trumpets are warning judgments. They don't kill off the whole population.

They really are a third. A third of everything is affected. A third of the trees are burned up with the first trumpet.

A third of the sea turns to blood. And a third of the ships are sunk. And a third of the waters become bitter.

And a third of the day is darkened. And a third of the night. All these thirds, the trumpets are all about one third, which I said is an emblem for a significant minority.

It's enough to really make a point. There's still more people surviving than not, but it's definitely trying to get their attention, trying to get them to repent. And they don't repent.

Now these horses that are described have heads like lions and tails like serpents. Their tails bite like serpents. Their tails have heads that bite like snakes.

The lion's heads of the horses, one wonders why they're called horses. But then one has to wonder why the first group are called locusts. They don't, in most respects, resemble locusts at all, nor do these really resemble horses at all.

Except that horses are, throughout scripture, an emblem of armies, of military power. And therefore, as the locusts probably represent a demonic invasion, the horses no doubt represent a military invasion. And this would be the Romans coming and following up on the invasion of the demons.

And so, Jerusalem finds itself assailed both spiritually and militarily. Now out of the mouth of these horses, so to speak, really out of their lion's mouths, come fire, smoke, and brimstone. It says a third of mankind are killed by the fire, smoke, and brimstone.

Now fire, I could see a lot of people dying from fire. And even smoke, because when a building is burning, most people die not from being burned, but from smoke inhalation. But brimstone? Brimstone is sulfur.

One has to wonder, well, how does sulfur kill people? And I think perhaps what we're to understand is that fire and brimstone, fire and sulfur, are symbolic. But for what? Well, fire and brimstone are mentioned a number of times in the book of Revelation. And it is best, I think, to understand the reference to fire and brimstone to be an imagery reminding of Sodom and Gomorrah.

It is Sodom and Gomorrah who perished with fire and brimstone, and no doubt smoke, because it says that Abraham saw the smoke of the city rising like that of a great furnace the next day. So you've got the fire, brimstone, and smoke destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Now

Jerusalem in Revelation is called Sodom.

Remember chapter 11 verse 8, it says the city where our Lord is crucified, clearly that's Jerusalem. It says it's spiritually called Sodom. And Egypt, which means that the destruction of Jerusalem is being described in emblems reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom, and also emblems representative of the destruction of Egypt, which would be, of course, the plagues.

The plagues in Revelation are echoes of the Egyptian plagues. That is, in the symbolism of the book, there is a city, Jerusalem, symbolically likened to Sodom, and symbolically likened to Egypt, and the judgments are symbolically similar. That is to say, we don't really have real fire and it is the destruction of the city likened to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Probably meaning in principle, not in type, not in actual way. I mean, God didn't destroy Jerusalem and has never destroyed any city that we know of other than Sodom and Gomorrah and the three cities with it in this manner. But it's symbolic.

It's reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom. It's seen as a divine judgment. It's a divine judgment that takes out about a third of mankind, but the form is in horses.

God's judgment is coming through an army, through military invasion, and I think that that is what is being suggested here. Now, I want to say something about the number of these. It says in verse 16, now the number of the army of the horsemen was 200 million, and I heard the number of them.

Now, 200 million, if a literal number, would be an incredibly large army such as would never exist in ancient times and would hardly be expected to exist today, except for the fact, as Hal Lindsey was fond of pointing out whenever he spoke about this, that Mao Tse-Tung had boasted that China was capable of fielding an army of 200 million, this very number that the Bible mentions. The coincidence was irresistible to the dispensationists. This is clearly referring to Chinese armies attacking in the Battle of Armageddon.

Now, of course, we haven't read of the Battle of Armageddon yet here, but this battle, these horses, could be said to be the same ones that come in chapter 16 in a battle that is called the Battle of Armageddon, or it's called the Battle of the Great Day of God Almighty, which takes place at Megiddo, or Armageddon. And it is in chapter 16 where we read also of those, of the river Euphrates drying up to make way for the kings of the east to come. So from our perspective, since John is perceived as being in America, the kings of the east, what country is more east to us than China? And that there are 200 million soldiers fits like a hand in a glove with Mao Tse-Tung's boast.

So we've got the dispensationists seeing it almost impossible to resist this identification. However, as I've said previously, I think the drying up of the river Euphrates to make way for the kings of the east is an image of the Persians conquering Babylon. It's in the context of Jerusalem falling likened to Babylon's fall.

Remember how many times in Revelation it says, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great harlot of Babylon. Well, how did Babylon fall? The Persians, the kings of the east that is, not the Chinese, the Persians dried up the river Euphrates and marched under the wall of Babylon. So the drying up of the river Euphrates to make way for the kings of the east is not a reference to China, it's a reference to a historical event which is providing in principle a similarity to what's going on here.

A fall of a new Babylon. Jerusalem is the new Egypt and therefore the plagues are like the plagues of Egypt. It's the new Sodom so that its destruction is likened in imagery to that of Sodom.

It is the new Babylon, therefore its destruction is likened in the imagery of the fall of ancient Babylon. The ancient judgments on Egypt, Sodom, Babylon, and even Jericho are applied because the very use of seven trumpets is like Joshua and the seven priests with the seven trumpets that sounded that caused Jericho's walls to fall. Obviously Jerusalem is being likened to various pagan entities, pagan cities and countries that God judged in the past.

In the past God judged all those entities for Israel's sake, but now Israel has become as bad as they are and now he's judging them as an example of his consistency. He judged those wicked nations when they're that wicked, when Israel becomes that wicked, he judges them in the same manner and therefore the likeness to the fall of Jericho, the fall of Sodom, the fall of Egypt, the fall of Babylon. These images are conveying the idea that Jerusalem has become what all these nations were.

All these nations were destroyed by God because of their wickedness and now Jerusalem has become as wicked and God is judging it too. All the imagery from these historical judgments is being used in order to shame the Jews who thought themselves to be a better people, but they're not any better and therefore their judgment is not any better. So we have these horses and this large army.

Now I would take this to be the Roman armies, but of course the Roman armies were not 200 million, true, but I'm of the opinion that the numbers in Revelation can in many cases, if not all, most cases anyway, be shown to be symbolic rather than statistical. In this particular case, verse 16, he says, the number was 200 million and I heard the number of them. You might think, well that is a way of emphasizing that this is a literal number because he heard the number announced, but if you look back at chapter 7 when the remnants are sealed to be delivered, in Revelation 7, verse 4 he says, and I heard the number of those who were sealed.

That's 12,000 from this tribe, 12,000 from that tribe, and so forth. Now people, if they wish, can take this literally if they want to, but to my mind the symmetry is too great to be considered to be literal. 12,000, literally 12,000 men from each of the 12 tribes, God could do it.

That is, if he could find 12 tribes today, the Jews don't even exist in 12 tribes anymore. The 10 tribes to the north are essentially absorbed and the ones that were absorbed into Judah have

for the most part lost their tribal identity. Not all of them.

There are some Jewish names that still retain some memory of their tribal ancestry, and that was true in Jesus' day. It's even true today. If you meet someone named Cohen, well the word Cohen means priest.

It seems obvious that somewhere in their ancestry were Levites, the tribe of Levites, and no doubt there are other Jewish names whose meanings preserve something of their tribal ancestry, but we do not have distinctive tribes anymore. When Jerusalem fell, along with it were burned up all the ancestral records, and therefore the Jews since that time have not had authoritative records to even identify what tribes they're from. So I believe when it says there's 12,000 from this tribe, 12,000 from that tribe, it's simply spelling out that this is a large number of a remnant from all the tribes, or from Israel generally, and when he says I heard the number, I don't think he's saying this is a literal number.

He said I heard the number twice, the time when it was 144,000 and also the armies that are numbered here 200 million. I don't think either of them are references to literal numbers, but you can if you want to. If so, it wouldn't be the Roman armies.

The Romans didn't have 200 million, but I don't think that's necessary. I think the number is intended to be an emblem of an overwhelming, invincible army that the Jews or whoever was attacked by them would never have any hope of driving back. Some of the details about these I cannot comment on.

I don't know why the mouths are like lions or why the tails are like serpents, except to say that both of these are images that are sometimes used of Satan, and it may be that saying although the judgment is from God with the fire and brimstone reminiscent of God's judgment on Sodom, yet the agency is of an army that is more inspired by Satan than by God. God uses Satan's people many times to bring about judgment as he used the Assyrians to destroy Samaria in the Old Testament and the Babylonians to destroy Judah. Those were the devil's people.

Those were worshipers of other gods, but God used them because he's sovereign and he can do what he wants to. Now, we are expecting now to read of the seventh trumpet sounding, but once again we don't. When we expected to see the seventh seal broken, we didn't.

There was this chapter seven was an interlude between the sixth and the seventh seal. Likewise, we have an interlude between the sixth and the seventh trumpet. We've read of the sixth trumpet, but we will not read of the seventh trumpet until we get to chapter 11 and verse 15 where it says, Then the seventh angel sounded, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.

Notice what happens with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. In addition to the

announcement that Christ has now become the king of every kingdom, and the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, We give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the one who is and who was and is to come, because you have taken your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and your wrath has come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that you should reward your servants, the prophets and the saints, and those who fear your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth or the land.

Now this is the seventh trumpet. There are certain preterists who believe that this is simply talking about the destruction of Jerusalem, and when it says that nations were angry and it's time for you to judge the dead, it just means it's time for God to vindicate the dead. That is, the dead martyrs were vindicated by the fall of Jerusalem because Jerusalem had shed their blood, as Jesus said, from the time of Abel to the time of Zechariah.

And they talk about destroying those who destroy the land, meaning the Jews who had defiled the land by their sins and so forth. So there is an argument made by most preterists that the seventh trumpet is simply another look at the downfall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Perhaps you'll be surprised to know that I don't see it that way.

I see how people can, and I can't prove that they're wrong, but I have my reasons and I'll give them. And I don't believe anything without reason. I may believe some things without such reasons as others would see as adequate reasons, but I don't believe anything without reasons that I consider to be adequate, and my belief is that this is the second coming of Christ.

That it is the end of the world, the judgment and the resurrection, and so forth. Now that might seem really inconsistent for someone who's a preterist like myself, but you see, right after chapter 11, we go back to the beginning again. Chapter 12 is the birth of Jesus.

It's like there's a consideration of the destruction of Jerusalem, and then a long gap is given. Then you see what I consider to be the second coming of Christ. You're welcome to see it otherwise, but I'll tell you my reasons.

You're still welcome, even after you hear my reasons, to see it otherwise. But I believe that the question that is naturally asked when people are reading about this cataclysmic judgment of Jerusalem is, well, is that the end of the world then? It sounds like it. It's described in terms of so cataclysmic, and once Israel's removed, what is there left? I mean, this is God's ancient, eternal people.

How could they be destroyed and it not be the end of the world? And the answer of Revelation is, well, not quite. There's more to come, but the end of the world will come. As Jesus was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem, and he said, this generation will not pass before these things are fulfilled.

Then he said, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But of that day

and hour, no one knows. Although, again, many preterists would disagree with me, I believe Jesus then transfers his vision in Matthew 24 to the end of the world and the second coming of Christ.

That the end of Jerusalem was, from Jesus' point of view, the next big judgment. And after that, the next big one will be at the second coming of Christ. The gap between the two is not left out.

There is a gap suggested, I believe, and I think we're going to read about that in chapter 10 and the early portion of chapter 11 before the seventh trumpet is blown. Now, I would remind you that in the case where the seals were broken, and we had many reasons when we cross-referenced scripture with scripture to believe that we were reading about the destruction of Jerusalem, we saw that the remnant of the Jews were preserved, the 144,000. But then it looked at the innumerable company of Gentiles that would be saved, which seems to look beyond the fall of Jerusalem, the outcome.

After Jerusalem has fallen, evangelism goes out to the whole world. And an innumerable company of Gentiles from every nation and people in time is the church age. John, or the Holy Spirit, I believe, is saying that the next big event for John's readers is the destruction of Jerusalem, but it's not the end of the world.

However, there will be an end of the world. Heaven and earth will pass away, but if that day, no one knows. But I'll tell you something about that, too, in case you're wondering, is this the end of the world? No, there's also going to be this ingathering of all these Gentiles.

There's going to be this indeterminate time from the destruction of Jerusalem to the end of the world. And that, I believe, now comes up for consideration. As I said, I have reasons.

It may seem like a cockamamie theory, but let me tell you why. We come in chapter 10 to a transition, and I realize how soon I have to end, so I'm not going to go over time, but I just want to deal with chapter 10, which is a short chapter, only 11 verses, and I take it as a transition between what we've been looking at, which I believe is the judgment on Jerusalem, on the one hand, and a treatment of the period from the destruction of Jerusalem until the actual seventh trumpet, until the end of the world. Now, remember, Paul said at the last trumpet, the dead will rise, and we who are alive and remain, we are going to be changed.

We won't all die, but we'll all be changed, he said. The trumpet shall sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. He said that's at the last trumpet.

Paul was probably not thinking of Revelation, since it's not likely that Revelation had been written so early, as Paul Paul's running of 1 Corinthians, but it's possible that the early church used the term last trumpet as Paul used it, generally speaking, and therefore would be expected to recognize the last trumpet being the seventh when this vision was given. But here's the thing. There's a new prophecy given here, and it is heralded by this vision at the beginning of chapter 10.

Now, what we're going to find is that in chapters 11, 12, and 13, now I didn't lay it out this way, so don't blame me. You wouldn't expect the seventh trumpet to fall right in the middle of this section, but in chapters 11, 12, and 13, there are a number of references to a time period that is recorded as three and a half years. It actually doesn't say three and a half years.

It says different things. It says 1,260 days. That's three and a half years.

Or it says 42 months. That's also three and a half years. Or it says time and times and the dividing of a time.

Well, that is also three and a half years. These three references, 1,260 days, 42 months, and time times and half a time, are all different ways of talking about the same length of time, three and a half years. For some reason, Revelation, among the other strangenesses of the book, strangely doesn't speak of this time by the same way.

Sometimes it's the number of days, sometimes the number of months, sometimes the number of times. If a time is a year, then a time, that's one year, and times makes two more years, and then half a time is half a year. That's three and a half years.

And this period of time is spoken of, these various terms are used interchangeably in chapters 11, 12, and 13. That period of time is not mentioned outside of those chapters. Chapters 11, 12, and 13 are like a separate unit that talk about this period of time.

Prior to chapter 11, you don't read of a three and a half year period. After chapter 13, you don't read of a three and a half year period. But within those three chapters, you find it mentioned five times.

It is clear that this section, chapters 11 through 13, is about a period of time that is symbolically likened to a period of three and a half years. And four different things are said to take place for the duration of that time. In chapter 11, we will see that the Gentiles tread upon Jerusalem for that period of time.

Revelation 11, 2 says, Leave out the court which is outside the temple. Do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. They will tread the holy city underfoot for 42 months.

So Jerusalem will be trodden underfoot by Gentiles for 42 months. You may remember that in Luke 21, Jesus said that when the Romans would destroy Jerusalem, Jerusalem, he said, will be trodden underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. From the time of 70 A.D. to the end of the times of the Gentiles is here called 42 months, which I believe is symbolic.

And then we have the two witnesses prophesying, and they also prophesy for the same length of time. In Revelation 11, 3, I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy 1,260 days. That is the same thing as 42 months.

So we have the treading underfoot of Jerusalem for this period of time by the Gentiles. We have the witness of the two witnesses, who I will give you advance notice, I believe the two witnesses are the church. And their witness extends for this whole period as well.

Then we find that the woman flees into the wilderness in chapter 12 and is nurtured by God there for the same length of time. In verse 6 of chapter 12, it says she is fed there for 1,260 days. And the same in verse 14, it says that she is nourished, in verse 14, for time and times and half a time in the wilderness.

So this period of time, three and a half years, is also the length of time that God cares for the woman and the rest of her seed in the wilderness after she flees to the wilderness. And then in chapter 13, the beast arises, and in verse 5 of chapter 13, it says he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for 42 months. So the duration of the beast's blasphemies, the duration of the woman being preserved in the wilderness, the duration of the Gentiles trampling Jerusalem underfoot, and the duration of the two witnesses' ministry are all said to be the same length of time.

A time which I take to be symbolic. The most indicative of what time this is is the very first reference to it, when the Gentiles will tread Jerusalem underfoot for 42 months. And Jesus has already told us that is from the time that Jerusalem is destroyed in 70 A.D. until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

So my guess is, and it's an educated guess, that the 42 months represents the time from the destruction of Jerusalem until the end of the times of the Gentiles, which I take to be the end of the age, which ends with the second coming of Christ. I don't think I'm making any leaps here yet. Now, what I'm suggesting is this discrete section, chapters 11 through 13, which talks about this period of time, is a smaller prophecy within the larger prophecy of the book of Revelation.

And that smaller prophecy is introduced in chapter 10. And let me just real quickly go over this, shouldn't take more than about 10 minutes I hope, to go over this chapter. It says, I saw, in chapter 10 verse 1, I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow was on his head.

His face was like the sun, his feet like pillars of fire. Some say this is a reference to Christ. It could be.

It doesn't matter whether it is or not. The identity of the messenger is not as important as what happened. And he had a little book open in his hand, and he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land.

And he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. Now, when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them. And the angel whom I saw

standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer.

But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, now that doesn't happen until verse 15 of chapter 11, but in the days apparently leading up to this sounding of the seventh trumpet, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as he declared to his servants the prophets. Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, go take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth. And I went to the angel and said to him, give me the little book.

And he said to me, take it and eat it, and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, you must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.

Now this eating of this book is reminiscent of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel chapter 3, he saw a prophecy written in a scroll, and he was told to eat it. And it too was sweet in his mouth, but later he felt bitterness as a result of it.

This is obviously one of the many allusions to Ezekiel, or rather rebirths of images from the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel. But John eats the prophecy, which means it becomes his next assignment. He is now to prophesy again, verse 11.

This little book represents another prophecy, but it's a little one. It is emphatically a little one. The book that had the seven seals, its size is not mentioned.

It's not significant, but this book is said repeatedly to be a little book. This is a smaller book, a smaller prophecy. It is not about less important material, but it's not going to take up as much space, as many pages.

It's small. I believe the little book is chapters 11, 12, and 13, which fall as it happens in the exact center of the larger book. Now I believe that this section, which talks about the 42 month period, the three and a half year period, is talking about what's happening between the fall of Jerusalem, which is what we came to with the sixth trumpet, and the end of the world in the second coming of Christ, which we come to in the seventh trumpet.

This interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet is the interlude between AD 70 and the second coming of Christ, which of course we now know has been very close to 2,000 years. I believe it is that period that is symbolically referred to as a three and a half year period. We'll talk eventually about why that number is chosen.

I will not have time tonight to give everything that I will when we come to chapter 11, and that'll have to be next time. But let me defend my thesis from chapter 10 that this is a transition to another brief section, which is represented as the little book. This little book represents

essentially what we might call the church age from AD 70 to the end of the world to the coming of Christ.

I am not aware of any commentary that takes this view, so this is my own opinion, but I don't know any commentator that has anything more reasonable to say on the subject. So let me tell you how I came to this opinion. First, I saw that John was told he's going to prophesy again.

Well, he's been prophesying all this time. He's got a second prophecy. It is represented by a small book.

It's a smaller prophecy. It is, he said in verse 11, about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings, which makes it in contrast to the subject matter of the larger prophecy. The larger prophecy is about Jerusalem and its fall.

This smaller prophecy has a broader range of interest. It's talking about things happening internationally. The church age is the time where the gospel goes out to every nation, kingdom, and tongue, and therefore this prophecy is going to encompass the world, not just Jerusalem.

All the nations. This is sort of indicated also by the fact that the angel is said to have one foot on the land and one foot on the sea, and that is stated twice. The land generally represents Israel.

The sea represents the Gentile world, and therefore it suggests that this angel's interests span beyond the boundaries of Israel to the Gentile world as well, and it's stated very clearly in verse 11 that this is true. So this little prophecy, this little book, is concerning international matters, which is no doubt intended as a stark contrast to the larger book, the book of Revelation, which is mostly about the fall of Jerusalem. Now there's something more here, because it says that he spoke, and when he spoke, verse 3, seven thunders uttered their voices.

We're never told what they said, and the reason is because John was told to seal it up. He was not permitted to write it. The content of the seven thunders, the voice of this angel, which I'm going to identify with the contents of the little book itself.

You don't have to follow me on this, but I'm going to. That what this angel had to say is the same thing as what he had written, or what was written in the book he was presenting. That was open.

Perhaps he was reading the book. The book was open in his hand, and seven thunders represent the message that this angel gave, but this message is specifically said to be sealed up, and that is interesting when you consider that the book of Revelation in general is said not to be sealed up, and why? In Revelation 22.10, with reference to the book in general, the book says, do not seal up the prophecy of this book because the time is at hand. Now Daniel, in Daniel chapter 12, was told to seal up his book because the time was not at hand.

When Daniel asked for more information from the angel, the angel said, go your way, Daniel. It's sealed up until the time of the end. You're going to grow old.

You'll be buried with your fathers. A long time is going to go on, but in the end of days, then it'll be relevant, so you don't need to know more. Seal this book up.

When a prophecy was sealed up, it was because it did not have immediate relevance. It had a more long-range future fulfillment. Revelation 22.10 says that the book of Revelation does not have a long-range fulfillment in general.

It is to be the time was at hand, so don't seal the book, the angel said, but this book, in a sense, is sealed up in contrast to the book in general, which suggests, perhaps, that its prophecies do extend off further into the future than the content and the subject matter of the book of Revelation as a whole. In other words, we have a parenthesis in the exact center of the book of Revelation which answers questions that would naturally come up. Okay, we've seen the end of Jerusalem.

What does that mean? What does that portend? Is that the end of the world? Is there something relevant to the rest of us in this? And the answer is, oh yes, very much so. After the fall of Jerusalem, there's this period, symbolically called three and a half years, where very important things happen. And they span the time between AD 70 and the end of the world, because it says, Revelation 10, verse 7 says, Now, what is the mystery of God? The term is used, the word mystery is used quite a few times in Paul's writings.

Paul didn't write this, so it may not be used the same way, but Paul uses the term very consistently of one thing, the church. In Ephesians chapter 3, for example, only one of a number of places where Paul talks about the mystery, and he never means something different by it. It says in Ephesians 3, verse 3, What is the mystery? The joining of Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ is the mystery that Paul speaks about.

And remember, when Paul talks about the end of the age, in 1 Corinthians 15, he says, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. When the mystery of God is finished, when the church age is complete, then the seventh angel sounds.

In the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he's about to sound, the mystery of God will be finished. So, I think we have the clues here. I don't know of any other interpretation of Revelation 10 that could be supported from so many cross-references and so many clues.

It seems to me that we are now introducing another segment of the book that's only short, a small book. It is international in its scope, unlike the rest of the book, and it is to have a more far-ranging future fulfillment, unlike the rest of the book. It is sealed, like the rest of the book is not sealed.

It is about many nations, kingdoms, and tongues, not about Israel alone. It is spanning the time between the sixth and the seventh trumpet, and it announces that when the seventh trumpet is about to sound, the mystery of God will be finished, which I take to be the church. And therefore, I believe, and there will be more reason to believe this as we go through chapters 11,

12, and 13, because there we will have to use cross-references to figure out what the time frame is we're talking about.

But I've already mentioned, it is the time during which Jerusalem is trodden underfoot by the Gentiles, another indicator that we're talking about the church age, because Jesus said that would happen until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. So, I believe we're going to come back to the subject of the fall of Jerusalem in chapter 14 and through chapter 19. But in this section, I think not.

In this section, I think we're looking at something else. And as we come to chapters 11, 12, and 13, and treat them individually, I will defend every point I make from scripture. But this is where we're going, and that's what I understand to be the function of chapter 10, to transition us and to introduce that there's another prophecy John's going to have to give.

And it's different in scope and in time of fulfillment. Well, that'll have to wait until next time.

OpenTheo

Revelation 11

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this piece, Steve Greg discusses Revelation 11, which he believes to be a remarkable and deliberate contrast to the rest of the Bible. While the things written in the book may seem to refer to specific situations, such as spiritual warfare, victory in Christ over Satan, and vindication in heaven, the early chapters and breaking of the seven seals bring forth the prophecies of Christ's return. The speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing these events as true and how they relate to the book's themes of victory and vindication.

Transcript

We're going to be turning in this session to chapter 11 of the book of Revelation. One of the things in this chapter, there's three things in this chapter, and one of them, the part that's in the middle, is the well-known and much speculated upon prophecy of the two witnesses. Some commentators have said that this is the book of Revelation.

This is the most difficult passage in Revelation, judging from the many interpretations that have been given to it by different commentators. But before we get into the material, I need to remind you of what we were discussing just at the end of our last session. And that was a consideration of chapter 10.

Now, my view of Revelation is, in general, of course, somewhat a minority view. Although one that is increasing some credibility in evangelical circles. Certainly the past 30, 40 years, the view, the general view of the partial preterist has been recognized as having merit, especially as people are becoming more and more acquainted with what actually happened in AD 70.

It was my problem when I was younger teaching the book of Revelation. I assumed that nothing like this had ever happened before, so it must necessarily be future. And it was not my privilege, my teachers did not give me the privilege to know what had in fact happened.

And we do have record of it, authoritative record from an eyewitness named Josephus. And it's interesting how much he, though not a Christian himself and not aware of the book of Revelation himself, seemed to confirm so many things about it. Because John said to his original readers, who were of course living in the first century, that the things he was writing

must shortly come to pass and that the time was near.

And we saw in chapter 22, verse 10, that he was told not to seal up the words of the book of this prophecy because the time is at hand. And that is significant when we come to chapter 10, because there's some other information given, which is sealed up. But the sealing up or not sealing up of a prophecy has to do with how soon the fulfillment is expected to be.

In Daniel chapter 12, when Daniel asked the angel, what shall the end of these things be? When he was asking about the prophecies of chapter 12, he was told, go your way Daniel, it is sealed up until the time of the end. And he later said, seal up the prophecy until the time of the end. He said, Daniel, you will grow old, you'll be buried in a ripe old age, and in the end of days you'll stand.

But for the time being, you're not going to understand this stuff. And so the sealing up of the book of Daniel was because it wasn't to be understood or read or applicable in the immediate future. It had a long-range fulfillment.

But in Revelation chapter 22, verse 10, by contrast, John said, don't seal this book because the time is at hand. So, I mean, the contrast is deliberate and remarkable. That whereas Daniel's prophecies would not soon be fulfilled after the time they were written, Revelation, John is told, is soon going to be fulfilled after the time of its writing.

Which would instruct us to look for something in the near future from John and his readers' point of view that might correspond to the things we read about. Now, of course, finding things that correspond requires that we recognize the degree to which the book of Revelation fits into a genre of literature called apocalyptic. Where there's a great amount of apocalyptic literature has been discovered now by scholars, which dates from the time prior to Revelation as much as three centuries before Revelation.

And that we see now that the Jews and the early Christians were very fond of this particular genre, this apocalyptic style literature where a message was given in symbolic visions. And with symbols of monsters and demons and angels and earthquakes and volcanoes and thunders and lightnings, all these things really representing somewhat more mundane matters. Wars, nations fighting against each other, the fall of empires, the fall of kingdoms and cities and so forth.

In apocalyptic literature described in seemingly cosmic proportions. And so we find in the book of Revelation the same usage. And when we look for any events that seem to be the fulfillment in the near future from the time of John and his readers, we do in fact find something.

And I've always thought it was interesting, I think providential, that we even have Josephus. Do you know how few books from 2,000 years ago have survived for scholars to read today? Josephus' work is as old as the New Testament in times it was written at the same time he was contemporary with the apostles. There are some books older that exist, but not very many

comparatively.

And from the time of Josephus and the apostles, not very many books have survived. But perhaps in the providence of God, Josephus' works and his history of the Jewish war, which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem after a terrible, horrendous war and siege, that document has survived. And I suppose we should consider how at a loss we would be if it had not.

Because we would not know really anything about the fall of Jerusalem, which, according to Jesus, was the subject of much prophecy. Jesus said that the destruction of Jerusalem would occur to fulfill all that was written over in Luke 21-23. He said that.

So the fall of Jerusalem is apparently, according to Jesus, the subject of much prophecy in the Bible. Yet if we didn't have Josephus' work, we wouldn't even know what happened. We wouldn't even know the prophecies were fulfilled.

We don't have really any detailed information about it outside of that. We have some historians that mention that Jerusalem fell to the Romans, but not much more. And yet Josephus, an eyewitness of those events, wrote extensive details about it.

And it has really, in some ways, allowed us to recognize that the things that Revelation talks about, many of them, seem to have come true. Now, in that respect, I'm not very unique. There's many people who understand Revelation in a partial, preterist way and see the book as primarily about A.D. 70.

But those who do don't usually see these chapters we're coming to now the way I do. Because the way I'm looking at chapters 11, 12, and 13 is more the way that an entirely different approach to Revelation looks at them. The idealist view.

The idealist view looks at the whole book of Revelation a certain way. The preterist view looks at the whole book of Revelation a different way. I look at part of the book of Revelation in a preterist way and part of it in an idealist way.

What does the idealist say? The idealist says that the things in Revelation pertain to the whole age of the church. And they depict symbolically certain important trends, principles, realities that are universally and always true throughout the age of the church. Things like spiritual warfare, the victory of Christ over Satan, the vindication of martyrs in heaven.

And things that really don't apply to only one situation. They apply to the whole age of the church. These things are true.

And that they are depicted in symbolic ways. Well, the idealist thinks the whole book of Revelation should be understood that way. I tend to only take portions of it that way.

And I only do so, I don't do it by default. In other words, if I can't make sense of it a certain way,

I just kind of fall back on some other way just because it's there. Actually, I don't do that.

I have thought through, and I may not have thought through correctly. It's not my intention to tell anyone that they have to agree with me. But I can't teach it some other way when I have come to see it a certain way.

So you will have to judge for yourself whether my reasons are adequate. In the unfolding of the early chapters up through chapter 9, we had the breaking of the seven seals and the sounding of the first six of the seven trumpets. The seventh trumpet has not yet been sounded until chapter 11, verse 15.

But at chapter 10, a pretty short chapter, I have seen a transition. John in chapter 10 saw an angel with one foot on the land and one foot on the sea, holding an open book in his hand. And when he spoke, seven thunders uttered their voices.

And when John intended to write down what the seven thunders said, he was told not to do it, but to seal it up. And then he was told that in the days of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, would be complete. And John was told to go and eat the little book, as Ezekiel similarly ate a scroll in Ezekiel chapter 3. And like Ezekiel, he found it to be sweet in his mouth, but bitter in his belly.

Obviously, an echo of Ezekiel chapter 3 here. But when he ate the scroll, he was then told in chapter 10, verse 11, you must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings. Now, here's my proposition.

This chapter 10 is announcing that there is now a second prophecy to be considered. You will prophesy again. You've already been prophesying all this time.

You're going to have another prophecy now. This one pertains to many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings. It seems to me that this is in contrast to the prophecy he's already been occupied with, which is not about many nations, peoples, tongues, and kings, but about one kingdom in particular, and Jerusalem.

I believe that most of the book is concerned with the fall of Jerusalem, but not all of it. Because here's this additional prophecy that is said specifically to have a broader scope encompassing basically the Gentile world, not just Jerusalem. Furthermore, that the angel has one foot on the land and one foot on the sea seems emblematic that his significance spans Israel and the nations.

The land as a typical image for Israel, the sea an established symbol for the nations or the Gentile world. The angel's standing on both. He's holding an open book.

Apparently this open book is the prophecy that John has to give because he eats that book and it becomes his message. The book is said to be a little one. It is emphatically a little one.

Several times it is referred to as the little book. Now there was another book earlier in chapter 5 with seven seals, but it was not said to be little or large. Its size was not a significant factor.

Nothing was said about its size. But this one is said to be little. It's a smaller prophecy.

It should occupy less space. Now, furthermore, when the angel holding that book began to speak, his voice was accompanied by or followed by seven thunders. We don't know and will not be able to find out what those seven thunders said because it was not recorded.

But what's more important is why it's not recorded. It is said that they were sealed up, which is, as I pointed out yesterday, a direct and deliberate contrast with the rest of the book of Revelation, which is not sealed. In chapter 22, the book of Revelation is said not to be sealed because it has a near fulfillment.

These seven thunders are told to be sealed. It doesn't say because they don't have a near fulfillment, but that is what the sealing or not sealing of a prophetic book seems to suggest. So that this smaller prophecy, this small book, it seems to be international in its concern and not so much immediate in its fulfillment.

It's the sealed up portion of the larger book. Now, having said that, I'm going to suggest that this little prophecy pertains to the period from AD 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed, to the actual end of the world. That is when Jesus returns in the future.

That period has been nearly 2,000 years now. How much longer it may be, we will not speculate, but it is a long time. And it is perhaps coextensive what we would be inclined to call the church age, the present age.

It is an age where God is reaching out to Gentiles, hence the prophecy has to do with many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings. It is not immediately fulfilled in John's time because it is stretched out over a very long time into the far distant future from John's point of view. So it is sealed.

But he is told in chapter 10, verse 7, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished. I suggested that the mystery of God here spoken of is the same mystery of God that Paul frequently speaks of, which is what? In Ephesians chapter 3, he said the mystery of God is that the Jews and the Gentiles would become one body in Christ. There is the church.

The church is the mystery of God. And by the time the seventh angel sounds, the mystery of God is completed. The church, I believe, at that point, has reached the culmination of its mission on earth.

That is what I am assuming. Now when we actually read about the sounding of the seventh trumpet, it does sound like the end of the world. In chapter 11, verse 15, the seventh angel sounded and there were loud voices in heaven saying, the kingdoms of this world have become

the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.

And the 24 elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshipped God saying, we give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the one who is and who was and who is to come, because you have taken your great power and reigned. The nations were angry and your wrath has come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that you should reward your servants, the prophets and the saints, and those who fear your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth. Now that may not be, some preterists believe it is not, but I believe it is the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment and the rewarding of the saints, the time when the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, as Daniel predicted that the kingdom of God like a small stone would grow into a great mountain to fill the whole earth and would break in pieces all these kingdoms that opposed it and would then itself be the one universal kingdom worldwide.

That strikes me as the same thing this is saying when it says the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever. So, while I acknowledge there are other views on this, I believe chapter 11, verses 15 through 18, the seventh trumpet referred to the end of the present age when Jesus returns. And therefore, when the angel tells John in chapter 10, verse 7, before when the angel, the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, that means when Jesus is about to come back, then the mystery of God will be completed.

The church will be complete. So that is what I'm thinking about John, I mean about Revelation chapter 10. It is transitioning from the main body of prophecy that we've been looking at to a smaller book, a smaller prophecy, broader in range, more far out in its fulfillment than the main body, but nonetheless treated briefly in a small book.

I have suggested at the end of our last session that chapters 11, 12, and 13 are that little book. Now, I'll tell you why. Because, of course, they immediately follow the introduction that there's another little book and another prophecy, but more than that, they have something in common with each other.

All three of these chapters, and only these three chapters, discuss a period of time which is referred to by different designations that equal three and a half years. For example, in chapter 11, verse 2, it's called, at the end of that verse, 42 months. In the middle of verse 3, that period is called 1,260 days.

That's the same thing as 42 months. In chapter 12, verse 6, at the end of verse 6, it says 1,260 days, which again is the same thing as 42 months. And in chapter 12, verse 14, at almost the end of that verse, chapter 12, verse 14, it says a time and times and half a time.

If a time is a year, then two times added to a time would be three, and half a time would be three and a half years. That's how long 42 months is. That's how long 1,260 days is.

And in chapter 13, verse 5, at the end of that verse, it says 42 months. So five different times we have referenced to a period of time that is, although it's the same length of time, it's designated three different ways. Why? For stylistic reasons, maybe.

I don't know. But in any case, whichever designation is used, it totals three and a half years. Now, the way I was raised, I was taught that the tribulation period is seven years.

And although there's no place in the Bible that ever mentions such a seven-year period, I was taught that these five references to three and a half years, really some of them are the first half of the period and some of them are the second half of the period. And therefore, putting two different three and a halves end to end, you've got a seven-year period. But there's nothing in the material that makes it natural or necessary to see more than one period of three and a half years.

To my mind, in the absence of any hints that would point me otherwise, I would think that three and a half years is always the same three and a half years. And that the time period designated that way in Chapter 11 and 12 and 13 is the same period of time. And we never find that period of time after Chapter 13 or before Chapter 11.

It's only in those three chapters. And I, therefore, would like to float the theory by you that these three chapters are that little book that is introduced in Chapter 10. And that once we get through Chapter 13, we get back to the main body of the book, which is about the main subject matter again.

Now, I said that the little book, I believe, is related to the period from A.D. 70 to Christ's second coming, a period of something like 2,000 years so far. Where would I get that idea? Well, I get it from the very first reference to that period of time. Because it says in Chapter 11, and that's where we come to tonight, Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod, and the angel stood, saying, Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there, but leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles, and they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

Now, this is where I get the idea I have about this period of time. It says the Gentiles are going to trample Jerusalem underfoot for forty-two months. And this correlates with one other passage in the Bible that talks about the Gentiles trampling Jerusalem underfoot.

And that is in Luke Chapter 21, which I think gives us the cross-reference and the interpretation of the verses we're looking at. Jesus, in Luke 21, predicted that the destruction of the temple would come. That the temple would find total desolation, not one stone left standing on another.

He said that in Luke 21.6. As for these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down. He's talking about the temple in the context. You can see that by reading the previous verse.

But then when he said that, in verse 7, they asked him, saying, Teacher, but when will these things be? That is, when will the temple be thrown down? When will the stones be thrown down? That's what he predicted. When will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place? So these things are what Jesus predicted, the destruction of the temple. We know it happened in AD 70, but they were asking this question 40 years beforehand and didn't know when it would happen.

So they said two things. When will it be? What sign will there be that we know it's about to happen? In other words, will we have warning beforehand? Now, he answers them in what we call the Olivet Discourse. But when he comes to verse 21, or verse 20, Luke 21.20, he answers the question of what sign will there be that it's about to take place? Their second question.

In verse 20, he says, But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written might be fulfilled.

But woe to those who are pregnant and those who are nursing babies in those days, for there will be great distress in this land and wrath upon this people. So he's talking about the great trouble that would come upon that land and that people, the Jews in Jerusalem, when the Roman armies would come and besiege the city. He told the Christians to flee from there, and we saw already that they did.

Historically, it's recorded that they fled before the Roman troops besieged the city. But then he says this in verse 24 as he continues to describe the carnage. He says in verse 24, And they will fall by the edge of the sword and be led away captive into all nations.

This, of course, did happen. Many of them were slaughtered and many were deported into the Diaspora, where they remain, most of them today still. And he says, And Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles.

That starts to sound like something we're interested in here as we're trying to study the book of Revelation. We just read that it's given to the Gentiles and they will tread the holy city underfoot, Revelation 11.2 says, for 42 months. Jesus said, Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles, obviously from this point where Jerusalem falls to the Romans, from that point until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Now, the term the times of the Gentiles is not found anywhere else in Scripture, that expression. It's only used here. So, of course, there might be more than one way people would understand it.

And there are more than one way. But I think the way that most people would just assume intuitively, it means the times during which the temple is given over to the Gentiles or the time that the Gentiles prevail. Perhaps even the times during which God's outreach is going

primarily to Gentiles.

Since the fall of Jerusalem, most outreach has been to Gentiles. And the times of the Gentiles, in my opinion, we are still in. God is still harvesting among the Gentiles, primarily.

And I believe He will do so until Jesus comes back. I believe the times of the Gentiles simply refer to the time from 70 AD until Jesus comes back, during which the focus of evangelism is no longer on Israel as it was in the early years of the Church and is now on the world at large. But if that's true, then Jesus has told us the period of time that the Gentiles trample on Jerusalem is from 70 AD until the end of the world, if the times of the Gentiles is being understood correctly here.

From 70 AD to the end of the world. In Revelation, that same period of time is called 42 months. And therefore, the three and a half years that we encounter in Revelation 11, 12, and 13, I think the code has been broken for us by Jesus' words.

Revelation is full of symbolic numbers, mostly seven. Three and a half is half of seven. It's as likely to be symbolic as is seven.

And many other numbers in the book of Revelation that don't seem to be so much intended to be statistical but symbolic. But if we are correct in this assumption, then what I'm saying is that when we encounter this 1260 days, this time, times, and half a time, this 42 months, this period of three and a half years, that length of time is symbolic. It's not the actual length of time.

It's not even an approximate length of time. It's merely a symbolic number that represents that period of time. That's my suggestion.

Now what we will find is that several things are happening during that time in these three chapters. First, the Gentiles are trampling the holy city underfoot for that period of time. Secondly, as we will see later in this chapter, the two witnesses are prophesying.

Of course, if this is the time from 70 A.D. until the end of the world, these two witnesses cannot be seen as two individuals but something else. But that's okay. It's not too difficult to justify it.

But the two witnesses, which I take to be the church, and I'll tell you why presently, prophesy for the same period of time that the city is being trampled. Then we read of the woman fleeing into the wilderness, which the Jewish church did in 80 A.D. and nurtured there for the same period of time. That is, the Jewish remnant is kept and preserved by God for the same period of time.

And then we have the beast in chapter 13, and his period of blasphemy is that same period of time. Now, of course, if I'm not mistaken about the identity of this period of time, if it is in fact the whole age of the church, so to speak, from 70 A.D. on, then the beast cannot be an individual, nor is there the slightest reason in Revelation to think he is, even if we made the three and a half years literal. There's not one thing in the book of Revelation that would

encourage the view that the beast is an individual man.

He's got seven heads, ten horns, and all of those are kings. He's a system. He's not an individual man.

It's a political system. We'll talk about that later. We're not there yet.

But the point is, I believe the two witnesses are not individual men. I believe the beast is not an individual man. I don't believe the woman with the 12 stars on her head and clothed in the sun and standing in the moon, I don't think she's an individual woman either.

I believe we're seeing the apocalyptic imagery, typical of this kind of literature, representing principles or entities that are really not personal and depicting them symbolically as if they were persons. We've already encountered this earlier in the book of Revelation because we saw when the fourth horseman came out, the rider on the horse, who is obviously personified as a horse rider, is death. And running behind him is Hades.

Death and Hades aren't people either. They don't just last the lifetime of an individual. Death, Hades, these are principles personified.

So this is how Revelation does this. And so let's take a look here. What is chapter 11, verses 1 and 2 actually saying here? He was given a measuring rod and he was told to measure the temple.

The word temple there in the Greek, in verse 1, the word temple of God, the word temple is neos. In Greek, the word neos is the term specifically for the holy of holies, not the whole temple complex, but just the inner sanctum, the holy of holies. Now, later on in Revelation, the holy of holies seems to be identified with the New Jerusalem, which is itself identified with the church.

The New Jerusalem is dressed like a bride, adorned to see her husband. And when the angel says to John, come, I will show you the lamb's wife, we expect to see the church and we do, but what he sees is a city, the New Jerusalem, dressed like a bride. That's the lamb's wife.

A city? Once again, personification of something that isn't really an individual person. The bride is not an individual. The bride is the church.

Lots of individuals. By the way, the harlot isn't an individual either, in chapter 17. The individual characters in the book of Revelation represent larger entities, not individual persons in most cases.

And for that reason, I believe that the naos, the holy of holies as measured, is a representation of the true temple of God, the church. And what is it being measured for? Well, its dimensions are being procured so that it can be identified without question for what? So that it won't be given over to be trampled by the Gentiles for the next 42 months. In other words, the

measured portion is being preserved This is symbolic here, of course.

He's measuring the holy of holies, which I believe represents the New Jerusalem. Remember when the New Jerusalem is described in chapter 21, it's a cube shape, like the holy of holies is. The holy of holies in the tabernacle is 15 feet by 15 feet by 15 feet cubed.

No windows. No lights. It's just lit by the glory of God.

The shekinah. The New Jerusalem. It's cube shaped too.

1500 miles by 1500 miles by 1500 miles. It's rather large. Holy of holies needs to be because the privileges of direct access to God in the holy of holies now accrue to millions of people who are the church.

And the city has no need of the sun or moon or stars because the glory of God is its light, just like the holy of holies. You see, the holy of holies is an emblem, I believe, of the New Jerusalem or vice versa. The New Jerusalem is an emblem of the holy of holies.

And both are ways of speaking of the true church, the true temple of God. The true habitation of God among men is the church, the body of Christ, the community of Christ on the earth. Made of living stones, Peter said.

Now, it is the church then that is being identified by this measurement. And what is left out? The external temple. And it is apparently the temple in Jerusalem because it is the holy city that's going to be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles for these 42 months.

The temple courts, the outer court, which coincidentally probably corresponds to the court of the Gentiles, is given over to the Gentiles, not so that they can worship God, but so that they can trample the temple underfoot. They can trample the holy city. This appears to be predicting the destruction of the temple and the subsequent trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles for the period of time.

But before the temple is given over, before Jerusalem is given over to the Gentiles, that true church is identified to be preserved. This is not any different than the identification of the 144,000 by the mark on their forehead before the judgment is poured out on Jerusalem. But this image of the preservation of the naos, of the holy of holies, introduces something new that we haven't seen, and that is the period of time.

The earlier prophecies have described the destruction of Jerusalem, but have left unanswered the question, what happens after that? And one who reads the description of the destruction of Jerusalem in the earlier visions would certainly say, that looks like the end of the world. Is it? No, it's not. There's a period of time after that too, before the end of the world.

We'll call it 42 months. Now, of course, if I'm suggesting that 42 months or three and a half years is a symbol for the church age, I ought to be able to present a compelling reason why

that number, instead of some other, would have been selected to be a symbol of the whole age of the church. And, I can't.

I can't. I can think of reasons, but not compelling reasons. Some have compared it to the period of time that Nero persecuted the church, just like the beast is persecuting the church through this whole age.

Nero would be sort of a micro example of the beast. The beast extends through the whole church age, persecuting the church, but Nero was the current beast at the time, the current manifestation of this phenomenon, of the beast, the satanically inspired government that persecuted the church. And his persecution was three and a half years, and so that might make three and a half years to be a good symbolic number for the period of time.

But, another possibility is that since the two witnesses, who I'm going to identify with the church for reasons I'll give you when we get there in just a moment, they also prophesied for the same length of time. And what is the church but the body of Christ? It's the continuation of Christ's ministry. Christ's ministry was three and a half years.

If one wished to give a symbolic number for the ministry of the church, especially not having any idea how long it will actually be, and no one does know how long it will be, even now we don't know how much longer it may be, we can't give an approximation. We certainly can't give the exact period of time. So to pick a number that in some sense symbolizes it, to say, well, the church, that's the second part of Jesus, the second half of Jesus' ministry, the period of three and a half years was the literal length of time Jesus was in ministry.

Let's use that as a symbol for the church's ministry, which is also Jesus' ministry through his body after his ascension. That might be a reason for it, too. I honestly don't know.

I can't argue that it is for this cause or that cause that this number has been chosen. I can think of several possibilities, none of them compelling. What is compelling to me is that the 42 months is identified with the whole times of the Gentiles in the statement Jesus made.

And that seems to require that the period is symbolic for this age, and whatever reasons it may be chosen, I leave to your imagination or for God to show you, or for simply God to show you that the whole theory is wrong. But in any case, one of the things that is said to take place during this period is the giving over of Jerusalem to be trampled by the Gentiles. That's one thing that's going on for this period of time.

In other words, Jerusalem, which for so long, over a thousand years, was the headquarters of God's people and the headquarters of God's habitation on earth, it isn't anymore. It's been judged because of its rejection of Christ, sadly, and the headquarters are elsewhere. God dwells now in a temple not made with hands, a naos made of living stones, people.

And that has been identified before the judgment came and preserved. The rest is given over. Now, the next thing we learn is in verse 3 and following, I will give power to my two witnesses

and they will prophesy 1,260 days.

So the same period of time that Jerusalem is being trodden underfoot, the two witnesses are functioning. They'll be clothed in sackcloth suggesting that repentance is some aspect of their message. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.

This imagery is borrowed from Zechariah 4, verse 2 and 3 and 11 and 14. There's a vision in that chapter where apparently Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest were represented by two olive trees. That is at least the general theory of commentators.

All that Zechariah is really told is that these two olive trees are the two sons of oil or most translations say anointed ones. The two anointed ones that stand before the God of the whole earth. Now, anointed ones, what does the word Christ mean? Christos means the anointed one.

But this is perhaps the body of Christ. The anointed one broken down into multiple persons. The body of Christ is made up of many members now.

But why the two witnesses? Why not just one? The church is one body, not two. Could it be referenced to the Jewish and the Gentile elements in the church? It might be. However, after the fall of Jerusalem, the Jewish church and Gentile church don't seem to have a distinct role.

They're merged. In the days of the apostles, before Jerusalem fell, the Jewish church had its own identity. It worshiped at the temple and so forth and it was under the 12 apostles that were there.

But Paul and his ministry took out to the Gentiles and they had a separate mission and different things going on in the Gentile church than the Jewish church. But after Jerusalem fell, that distinction was pretty much less so. And the church was mostly merged.

True, the Ebionites were an early kind of legalistic Judaizing branch of the church even after 70 AD, made up of some of the Christian Jews who had fled from Jerusalem. And they were separate from the Orthodox church. But for the most part, since Jerusalem fell, there's no distinction between Jew or Gentile.

In fact, there wasn't in God's sight even before Jerusalem fell. But since Jerusalem fell, there just isn't this separate center for the Jewish church to be identified with anymore. They're worldwide like the Gentile church is.

It's all one church. There's no distinction. So I don't think it means the Jewish and Gentile elements of the church.

But the reason for saying two witnesses instead of one is because of the Jewish conviction based on verses in Deuteronomy and quoted many times, actually three or four times or more in the New Testament, that says, in the mouth of two or more witnesses every word shall be

established. Or as Jesus paraphrased it once in the Gospel of John, he said, the witness of two is true. Jesus said, it is said in your law, the witness of two is true.

He said, if I testify myself alone, my witness isn't true. But I have another that testifies of me. In other words, in the Jewish mind, a witness isn't necessarily credible.

Two witnesses are. Two witnesses are telling the truth. And therefore, to say that the church is a true and credible witness, it requires two.

And therefore, it's not even necessary to say why the number two would be an ideal number to describe the church, except that it couldn't be one. And these two, we're going to read a description of them, but one thing that's rather interesting, eventually in this vision, they get killed. And it says, we're going to look ahead just for the second, and then we'll go back.

In verse eight, it says, their dead bodies will lie in the street of that great city. Their dead bodies, actually in the Greek is their dead body. Their plural, dead body, singular.

The body of Christ is one. It's made of multiple individuals, but they are one body. And these two witnesses, I believe, are one body.

They are two witnesses because their witness is true. And the body of Christ is made up of more than one individual. But it is many members, but one body.

Now, verse five says, if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy, and they have power over the waters to turn them to blood and to strike the earth with all plagues as often as they desire.

Now, I haven't seen anyone walk around doing any of these things during the church age. Someone might say, well, this kind of doesn't make it look like it's the church at the present time. It looks like this must be someone in the future.

And so, that's how the futurist actually reasons. The reason that people are futurists is not because there's any good reason to accept that you can't take these things literally and make them apply to anything except the future. Because you can't find anything in the past where this literally happened.

People walk around calling fire out of heaven, turning water into blood. Unless, of course, we're talking about Moses and Elijah. Because two of the miracles recorded are those that Elijah does, and two are miracles Moses does, or did.

The ones that Elijah did were called fire out of heaven. Elijah did that once when the king sent 50 men to arrest him. Fire out of heaven came down and consumed the 50.

Another 50 came, same thing happened to them. Third 50 came, and the leader of the 50

begged Elijah to have mercy, and so he didn't call fire out of heaven on them. He went in and let them take him.

But he had the power to call fire down on his enemies and also to stop the heavens so it wouldn't rain for three and a half years. Another connection here to the three and a half years. Because Elijah stopped the rain and caused a drought for three and a half years, and then he prayed and it came back again, the rain.

So, two of the things Elijah did are attributed to these two witnesses. And then, turning water into blood and striking the earth with all plagues, that's what Moses did in Egypt. He turned water into blood, he struck Egypt with plagues.

So these guys, we have a sampling of their activities that are reminiscent of Moses and Elijah. Now those who are inclined to take this literally say, well, this must mean that Moses and Elijah are going to be coming back in the tribulation. After all, doesn't Malachi say, I'm going to send Elijah before your face? Isn't Malachi saying that Elijah is supposed to come again? And therefore, one of these witnesses must be Elijah and the other is probably Moses.

There's another theory too, that I was taught when I was a dispensationalist, and that is that certainly one of them is Elijah. The other one may not be Moses but might be Enoch. Why Enoch? Well, Elijah and Enoch have something in common.

In the Bible, they're the only two men of ancient times of whom it is suggested they did not die. They were taken into heaven without seeing death. Now, the way I was taught by my early teachers was, it says in Hebrews chapter 9 that it is appointed unto man once to die.

And those are two men in the Old Testament who never kept that appointment. They didn't die. It's appointed to men to die, and they didn't experience death, so they must come back and experience death.

And so the whole argument for Enoch being along with Elijah here is that these men have to meet their appointment with death. They're the only two who have not. However, there's a problem with that that anyone could discover just from thinking for a few minutes, clearly, and that is, Paul said, there's going to be a whole generation of Christians that don't die.

He said, we should not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. Paul said, the dead in Christ shall rise first, and we who are alive and remain should be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. There will be a whole living generation of Christians that will not die when Jesus comes back.

Will we all have to come back then and die too? Because we missed our appointment? Obviously, when Hebrews said it's appointed unto man once to die, it's not making an inflexible, absolute declaration. It's making an observation that, generally speaking, certainly people die, and they only die once, not twice. But there are exceptions of people who died twice.

We assume Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, Lazarus, these were all people that

died once and Jesus raised them. We don't have any record of it, but most people assume they finished living out a natural life and died again. That wouldn't be a problem in view of the statement in Hebrews, it's appointed unto man once to die.

The statement would mean, generally speaking, God has the power to make exceptions if he wants to, and certainly the generation that will be raptured at the coming of Christ is an exception. Those people who seem to have died more than once are an exception. Elijah and Enoch could both be exceptions too.

It's not necessary that God must make them come back and die. Now, I can see good grounds to see one of these as Elijah because of the connection both to the particular miracles recorded that resemble his and also those who believe that Malachi's prediction about Elijah coming has not yet been fulfilled. Jesus was not among them.

Jesus said, if you can receive it, John the Baptist is Elijah who was to come. And if Jesus says, if you can receive it, I'll say, I will. Lord, if you want me to, I'll receive it.

If you'll receive it, John is Elijah who is to come. Okay, I'll accept that. John was Elijah who was to come.

That means the fulfillment of the prediction. That's what who was to come means. The one that was predicted to come.

The one that Malachi talked about. John was him. Okay, so I'm not expecting Elijah back.

John was Elijah. Not literally, but he came in the spirit and power of Elijah according to the angel Gabriel who had preannounced his birth in the temple when he spoke to Zechariah, the father. And he said, your son will come in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the wicked to the wisdom of the just.

And the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. In any case, he's quoting Malachi 4, 5, and 6 and saying John the Baptist is that guy fulfilling that. So there's no reason to look for a future fulfillment of Elijah coming.

It's been done. Jesus is the authority on that for us. Nor Enoch.

There's nothing to identify this with Enoch unless we accept the reasoning that everyone has to die once. In which case, we're going to have to eliminate some of the things Paul said about our future. Some of us will not.

So, is it Elijah and Moses? They'd be good ones. If you're going to have two witnesses come in the end times, Moses and Elijah would be good ones, especially if they're in Jerusalem. It says their dead bodies lie in the streets of Jerusalem, the city Jesus was crucified in.

So if they're witnessing in Jerusalem, who could be a more effective witness to the Jews than Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets? So if a person is a futurist, there

seems to be little theories, a few theories that could be more commendable than to identify these two witnesses as Moses and Elijah coming back in the end times. And by the way, I mentioned this in our introduction. I've run into these two witnesses often over the past 40 years.

They show up once in a while. A couple of them picked me up hitchhiking once when I was a teenager. And they were the two witnesses.

They assured me. And not too long ago, just in the past few months, I got an e-mail from one of them. It was Elijah.

And he said, and he's in all sobriety, he said he's soon going to be getting in touch with, or Enoch's going to be getting in touch with him, and they'll be going to Jerusalem. So watch for that on Fox News. But there's a reason why this chapter has been said to be one of the most perplexing in the book of Revelation, because it's hard to identify these two if we're going to find two individuals as the two witnesses.

But, of course, a futurist view is not required. The Bible doesn't give us any command to take a futurist view of Revelation. In fact, it almost forbids it by the statement, these things must shortly come to pass, a statement made 2,000 years ago.

So if we don't take the futurist view and we don't take these as two actual people who are literally calling fire from heaven and turning water into blood, what's going on here? What seems to be said is that the supernatural power manifested through Moses and Elijah, representative, of course, of the law and the prophets, therefore the authority and the supernatural backup to that authority, which was seen in Moses and Elijah, is now attributed to these two. I take to be the church. Remember that the book of Mark closes in Mark 16, I think it's verse 20, it says, The apostles, whenever they were preaching the word, the Lord working with them, confirming the word with signs following.

Now they didn't call fire out of heaven or anything like that, but you can see that the signs and wonders that once credentialed Moses as a prophet of God and once credentialed Elijah in his day as a prophet of God, now that power, that miraculous confirmation of their message, was now belonging to the church. Now, many times when we read the Old Testament, we may not pay close enough attention to recognize this, we get the impression in the Old Testament there are a lot of miracles going on. There were in the time of Moses and in the time of Elijah.

Apart from that, not so much. We can think of many miracles in the Old Testament, but almost all of them are done by Moses or Elijah. When God established Israel during the Exodus and, of course, in the time of Joshua when they're taking the land, that was a cluster of miracles.

Plagues, miracles, supernatural provision, all kinds of things. Miracles through the man Moses. Why? Because God was credentialing him.

The people of Israel were skeptical. They needed to have abundant confirmation that God was

speaking through Moses. After all, they were committing their whole lives, putting their necks on the line to follow him.

God confirmed the word of Moses with signs following. Likewise, Elijah. Almost all the other miracles in the Old Testament are Elijah's miracles.

Or Elisha's. Elijah and Elisha. And so, in a sense, the miraculous power of God confirming the words of his prophets is now resting upon the church.

We're not turning water into blood. We're not stopping the rain. It's not necessary to say these exact miracles are going on.

This is saying that the miraculous power such as Moses had, such as Elijah had, that is the power of the Holy Spirit bearing witness to the message through supernatural things, is now held by these people, not by Moses and Elijah literally anymore. By the way, those who do make it literally, Moses and Elijah cannot say that it's appointed unto man once to die and hold firmly to that because Moses did die. For him to come back would require an exception to that rule too.

In any case, I believe that this is the impressionistic symbolism that's saying that the power of God confirming the message is no longer with the Old Testament but with these New Testament witnesses. After all, remember, Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus. Peter was incredibly impressed.

He said, Lord, this is great. Why don't we build three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah? In other words, let's prolong this. Let's make a whole weekend of it.

Let's have a retreat and Moses and Elijah and you can take turns preaching and boy, will we be under the spout where the glory comes out. What happened was Peter didn't say the right thing. The Bible says Peter said that because he didn't know what to say.

That's what it says. It apparently suggests it wasn't a very smart thing to say. It certainly wasn't the right thing to say because what happened immediately was a cloud came down, covered them.

Moses and Elijah disappeared. Jesus alone was left and a voice from heaven said, this is my son, hear him. Peter and the others were Jewish.

They'd always been raised to hear Moses and Elijah. The law and the prophets, that was the authority for them. Not anymore.

This is my son, hear him now. Don't retain Moses and Elijah and Jesus as though they're equals. They're just here to pass the mantle on to him and then they're leaving.

Only Jesus is remaining. Therefore, the ministries of Moses and Elijah have been subsumed under the ministry of Christ and his body. It is the authority of Christ and his church that now

have replaced Moses and Elijah and they nonetheless have the same kind of supernatural abilities that those men had.

That doesn't mean everyone in the church goes around doing miracles. I don't. I don't do miracles.

I'd like to, but I never have. Never have done miracles. Don't expect to, actually.

Maybe that's why I don't. I think people who do often expect to. People who don't expect to probably don't.

But the case is I don't consider that miracles are a ministry that I'm called to. I'd like it. It would be kind of fun.

But it's not saying that every Christian is going to be working miracles or that any Christian is going to do these specific miracles. The chosen examples are to connect them in principle to Moses and Elijah, the ones that God confirmed their message with signs following in the Old Testament. Now what was true of them is true of the church.

Now verse 7 says, Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them. Now what's interesting is the beast has not ascended yet. This shows that the book of Revelation isn't giving things in chronological order because the beast is actually introduced two chapters hence.

He's not described previous to this. He's not mentioned previous to this. He's spoken of as if we know who he is.

But it's actually in chapter 13 that the devil calls up the beast out of the sea, and he is then described and his career is explained. But here we're given sort of a foreglimpse of the beast before he's even been introduced. He's spoken of as if we know who he is, that beast that comes up out of the bottomless pit.

Now the bottomless pit, the abuso, is where demons are incarcerated. So this beast is, you know, demonized. Comes from the pit of the prison for the demons.

He comes out of there, and he makes war against them, and he's allowed to overcome them and kill them. And their dead body will lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Now this is a reference to Jerusalem, though my impression is it's not just saying that the church will lie in the streets of Jerusalem.

It's rather that it looks to the world that the church is dead, and it's connected in their mind with having killed Jesus. It's placed in the vision in the same location where they killed Jesus. The death of the church is like another death of Jesus, but not exactly.

The witness, this is a symbolic vision. The church does not actually die. It appears to be dead.

I realize they're dead here, but the church doesn't really die. The church is never going to really die. But the time may come where it has been subdued, conquered, by the beast that comes out of the pit.

And it says, Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three and a half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put in the graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. So the message was a torment to their consciences.

Now, after three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, Come up here. And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them.

Now, the way I was taught this when I was a futurist was these two witnesses, maybe Moses and Elijah, maybe Elijah and Enoch, they're going to prophesy for three and a half years in Jerusalem. They're going to be killed by the beast, you know, the Antichrist when he comes up. And they are literally going to be dead in the streets of Jerusalem.

And no one's going to bury them. Everyone will get excited and send gifts to each other like they do at Christmas. And then, you know, the whole world is going to see them stand on their feet and rise into heaven.

Now, not only my pastor, but many authors I've read since then have made the point, this could never have happened before television. How so? Well, only now that we have satellite coverage of the whole world and we can watch events on the other side of the world in real time. Only because of the high technology we now have, could it be possible for the whole world to watch an event happen in the streets of Jerusalem and see these two witnesses stand up and go up? So, isn't that amazing? This is, you know, the book of Revelation anticipated television.

It's actually considered to be, you know, one of the things that, you know, is something that dispensationalists get enthusiastic about. Look at this, another confirmation of science from the Bible. Because it suggests that everyone in the world is going to watch them rise.

Now, let me ask about that a little bit. What are they trying to get us to picture? That these guys are dead. No one knows they're going to rise.

And yet, for three days, the television cameras are trained on their dead bodies. And at the moment they rise, it so happens everybody's at their television set watching this. This is now three and a half days of broadcasting.

And they're not watching, the cameras aren't saying, I know they're going to rise soon, so we're going to watch until they do. They don't expect them to rise, according to the story, and therefore they're just infatuated with this scene. We killed these guys, let's just train the

cameras on them for a few months.

Oops, they rose from the dead on the 30 and a half day. Who could have figured that would happen? Now, see, if we're going to argue that every person in the world is literally going to see this, then not only is everyone who has a TV going to have to be watching, at that moment, that channel that shows it, but more than that, there's going to be a whole bunch of people, like in jungles and stuff, they're going to have to get TVs too, so they can see it, because they're on the planet too. And if they're going to see it, we've got to get TVs into every hut, every village.

Maybe get a big screen just so the whole village can watch and they don't have to have it in every grass hut. But you see, to suggest that this is talking about people watching television, seeing this literally happen, is missing the point, and it's not very realistic. What's being said here is, apparently, that after a lengthy period of time, a time equal to essentially the whole age of the church, 1260 days, during which time the church is invincible, during which time the church is bearing witness to the world, there's a little time, represented as three and a half days, during which they seem to be defeated, but they're not defeated.

They rise from the dead and they're caught up into heaven. I take that to be the rapture of the church. I take that to be the resurrection and rapture of the church.

But what it seems to be saying is that the church age in general will be a time where the church is unstoppable. But a little tiny bit of time at the end, the church seems to be defeated. Now, in Revelation 20, we have a similar scenario, using different numbers and different figures.

In Revelation 20, a thousand years, I believe, is given as a representation for the age of the church. But the devil is released at the end from the bottomless pit like the beast here rises from the bottomless pit. In Revelation 20, the beast comes out of the devil's pit after a thousand years for a little while, and then threatens the church, besieges the beloved city, but does not succeed because fire from heaven comes down, which I take to be the second coming of Christ, and vindicates the church.

The imagery is different, but the concept is the same. A long time of invincibility for the church, a short time at the end where the church seems to be vulnerable again and defeated by the enemy because of the intensity of the satanic influence in the world. But that short time is like, you know, if the whole church age was three and a half years, that short time is like three and a half days.

If the church age is a thousand years, that little time is just a little while. In other words, for the most part, through most of the age of the church, the church is bearing witness on the offensive, taking the gospel to all lands, driving back the powers of darkness, and so forth. But in the end, apparently for a brief period, something else may happen.

The church may be driven underground. The church may be on the defensive. A time of intense persecution, possibly global persecution.

It's interesting here because it says in verse 7, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them. If we're talking about two individuals, do you make a war against two people? No, you just go out and arrest them. You don't send the tanks and all that stuff to conquer two guys.

The two individuals are an army, and the beast has his army, and there's a spiritual warfare between the powers of darkness and the church, and it would appear that the church is defeated, or appears to be so, but not for very long. And the world finally thinks that they've gotten rid of this pesky conscience that's been bugging them so long, and they celebrate, but to their chagrin, Jesus comes back, raises up the church, raptures the church, and in verse 13, in the same hour, there was a great earthquake, which could be an emblem for the end of the world when Jesus comes back. It's the same hour.

Jesus talked about the final hour, and in that hour, Jesus said, all the dead shall hear his voice and come forth, in John 5, 28. So, there's this earthquake. The earthquake, 7,000 men were killed, a symbolic number.

It's a total number, a very large number, because it's 7,000, not just seven, but seven itself is a number of totality. So, apparently, the total number of those who are opposed to God, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven, so some get saved, apparently. Maybe people who had not previously heard the gospel, but were not ill-disposed toward God, maybe when Jesus comes back, maybe they turn.

We don't know. In any case, I believe that this is a summary of the age of the church. It's what I also see Revelation 20 as, only using different imagery.

And then, of course, we have what we already read, and that is the sounding of the seventh trumpet in verses 15 through 18, which I take to be the second coming of Christ, the kingdoms of this world who become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. Now, having come to that, you'd think we don't need any more on this subject of the three and a half years. We've been told two things about it.

One, Jerusalem is trampled underfoot for that period of time. Two, the church is witnessing for Christ during that time in the world. But, after closing down the section of the seven trumpets with the giving of the seventh trumpet, it's like that's the end of the segment.

It's like chapters 10 and 11 were mostly the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet, just as there was an interlude between the sixth and seventh seal. And now we've come to the end. So, let's get back to the next thing, whatever that may be, the next sevens.

But, instead of doing that, we have two more chapters about the three and a half year period. And I said last night to someone who's asked me about it, why is the seventh trumpet in the middle of this little book if this little book is one thing? I said, I don't know. I didn't write it.

They didn't consult me. But, it looks to me as if this would be the natural close of that little book

except there's an appendix. Say, oh, by the way, there's more on this.

Now that we've actually brought this thing to a logical conclusion, there's some additional information about what's going on during this period of time. This woman flees in the wilderness. There's this war in heaven.

It's really cool. Satan's thrown out of heaven. There's this beast.

There are two beasts. And these have significance for the church. And therefore, before this period of time is left behind us and we move back to the main subject of the book of Revelation, this interval in the middle, this parenthesis, this little book, has a few more chapters at the end which serve sort of as an appendix, I believe.

And in verse 19, it says, Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail. Now, the ark of the covenant, of course, is in the Holy of Holies.

And it's in the temple here in heaven. So, this would seem to suggest that the church at this point is raptured. And John sees that the temple which was preserved and measured at the beginning of chapter 11 is now in heaven.

It was not previously. And then there's these standard lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail. We have this list of things that are... It begins in chapter, what, 5? And it talks about the lightnings and thunders and voices.

And then the next list is the lightning, thunders, voices, and an earthquake. And now it's lightning, voices, thunders, an earthquake, and great hail. And so, there's, as it were, a mounting dramatic element here.

These images of judgment are just getting more extreme, more severe as the book goes on. You see, you might think, well, then this is the end of the story if we've got... Jesus has come back. Isn't that the end? Well, it will be when it really happens, but it's not the end of the book.

Because in chapter 12, verse 1, we go back to the beginning and talk about the birth of Jesus and some of the things that happen after His ascension. Because in chapter 12 and verse 5, the child who is Jesus is caught up into God and to His throne. That's the ascension of Jesus.

But there's more. What happens after that? Well, the woman flees into the wilderness. The woman is the remnant of Israel, the church in Jerusalem.

They flee from the impending judgment, as Jesus had told them to, and they get into the wilderness. And God still preserves them there, even though He is destroying the city from which they fled. But we'll talk more about that next time.

We've run out of time for tonight. But we'll talk more about that next time.

OpenTheo

Revelation 12

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg delves into the 12th chapter of Revelation, which is part of a section that includes chapters 11 and 13. He notes that the majority of Protestants once held a Historicist view, which held that Jesus was cut off in the midst of the 70th week of Daniel. Gregg suggests that the seventh trumpet sound marks the end of the world and possibly the second coming of Christ. He then discusses the "great sign" that appears in heaven, which many Christians believe to be the woman with 12 stars on her head, and explores the symbolism of the pregnant woman and the dragon in the text.

Transcript

Tonight, we're turning to the 12th chapter of Revelation, and in chapter 11, we came to finally the seventh trumpet sounding. My belief, not everybody's certainly, but my belief is that the seventh trumpet signals the end of the world, the second coming of Christ, what Paul called the last trumpet. And between the sixth and the seventh trumpet, we saw that a new era, beyond that which has been considered previously in the book, seems to be introduced.

The introduction of the little book that, we will not go over the reasons again tonight, but in chapter 10, we looked at reasons to consider that the little book is not talking about the fall of Jerusalem, it is not talking about things that would shortly come to pass, it is not talking about things confined to Israel. While it is my view that most of the book is about those subjects. There is this section in the middle, this little book, this other prophecy, John was told he must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.

That's the last words we read in chapter 10. And then begins this section we have come into chapters 11, 12, and 13. Now in chapter 11, we saw we were introduced to a period of time which is called there, in verse 2 of chapter 11, it's called 42 months.

In verse 3, it's mentioned again as 1,260 days. Futurists believe that this speaks of a future tribulation period. Dispensationalists of the normal sort believe there are two three and a half year periods together, making seven year tribulation in the future.

Preterists usually identify this three and a half years with some past literal period of that length.

Possibly the persecution conducted by Nero, which was about that length. Or the Jewish war, which was about that length.

Those are different sets of calamities, but the point is futurists look for a more or less literal three and a half years or two times three and a half years in the future. Preterists usually look for three and a half years somewhere in the past related to the fall of Jerusalem because they consider that the whole book is talking about the fall of Jerusalem and I have departed from my normal preterist approach at this point. Historicists, and you will not meet many of them unless you go to the Seventh-day Adventist church probably, but at one time the view of the majority of Protestants was historicism.

They believed that the three and a half years should be broken down into days, 1,260, and each day should represent a year. So the historicists believe that the period under question is 1,260 years and they consider it to be largely applicable to the age of the papacy. And the beast whose blasphemies continue for that many days or years in their thinking is the papacy and therefore they believed that the whole career of the Roman Catholic bishop of Rome would be from about 600 when the papacy begins, according to most historians, to about 1,860 when they thought it would fall.

Well now you know why there aren't so many historicists as there used to be because 1,860 came and went a long time ago, 150 years ago, and the papacy is still with us. So the historicist view has kind of run out of steam as it were on this matter. It's the idealists that actually see this period the way I do.

The idealist view holds that the number, the time designation of three and a half years, whether it is used the days, whether it's 1,260 days, whether it's the 42 months, or whether it's that strange expression that Revelation borrows from Daniel chapter 12, time, times, and half a time, that all of these are talking about essentially a period that if literal would be three and a half years, but the idealist does not think it's literal, but symbolic, that the period represents something rather than estimates or gives a literal time period. The real time in question is not anything like three and a half years, maybe in principle, depending on what the three and a half years is considered to call to mind. I have suggested it calls to mind the ministry of Jesus, and therefore it is a symbolic designation that suggests the completion of the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus was cut off in the midst of the 70th week of Daniel. He started his ministry at the beginning of the 70th week. He was cut off in the midst of the week.

There's another week unaccounted for. And it's possible that Revelation is hinting that that other half week is really not literal at all, but it's the whole completion of the unfinished ministry of Jesus, and that completion is done through his body, the church, which would suggest that the 42 months or 1260 days is the same length as the age of the church. Not exactly the same length, because we have evidence that it begins at 70 A.D. The church began in 30 A.D., so it's the age of the church minus the first 40 years of church history.

So from 70 A.D. to the end of the age, until Jesus comes back, would be represented by this period. As you know, the reason I gave for that, the primary reason, the main indicator, although there are other lesser indicators, but certainly the strongest, is that we are told in chapter 11, verse 2, that the Gentiles would trample on the holy city of Jerusalem for 42 months. And Jesus said that the Gentiles will trample on the holy city of Jerusalem until the times of the Gentiles are over.

And so, Jesus, of course, in Luke 21, 23, when he says that, he's talking about the destruction of Jerusalem followed by the treading down of Jerusalem by the Gentiles. Jesus makes that length of time until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. And while that is a notoriously difficult phrase to dogmatically identify, since it's only found once in scripture, it sounds to me, at least, like he's talking about the rest of the church age, the rest of the time that God is bringing the Gentiles in.

He's given the Jews 1,400 years under the old covenant to get it right, 1,500 almost, and they didn't get it right. And so now, he's giving the Gentiles their chance. And Jerusalem will be trodden underfoot of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are over, and Jesus comes back.

Testing that theory, we saw that the two witnesses, if they are viewed as the church, they witness for that same period of time, 1,260 days. And at the end of their testimony, although they experience a brief defeat at the hands of the beast, yet they finally are vindicated and caught up into heaven as the church will be at the end of the church age. So, while we would not necessarily say that the matter is established beyond question, we at least have a workable theory, a plausible suggestion that the 1,260 days stands for the period from the destruction of Jerusalem until the second coming of Christ.

Now, we saw the seventh trumpet sound at the end of chapter 11, and thus the end of the world, if that is, in fact, as I'm thinking, the second coming of Christ. But in chapter 12, we go back to an earlier period again, and Revelation does this. There are overlapping visions that overlap each other chronologically, that run parallel to each other in time, and give us different aspects of the same period of time.

Perhaps it is the failure to see this that causes dispensationalists to believe there will be a seven-year tribulation, which is never mentioned in Scripture, but by thinking that the three-and-a-half years that we will read of now in chapters 12 and 13 is a different three-and-a-half years than that which we found in chapter 11. Anyway, it is my understanding that all the references to the three-and-a-half years are references to the same period of time symbolically depicted, and that every vision that has to do with that period gives us a different nuance, a different angle of what is going on, what God is doing, and what is happening, and what the devil is doing during that period. In chapter 12, we will see that period mentioned twice, although the two times it is mentioned are parallel to each other rather than sequential.

In Revelation 12, verse 6, we will see that the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a

place prepared by God, that they should feed her there 1,260 days. We will see that this chapter has a parenthesis in the middle, and that picks up the story at that same spot again down in verse 14, where it says, But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness to her place where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, which is again the same period of time, from the presence of the serpent. We will find that verse 6 brings us to the flight of the woman into the wilderness and tells us how long she will be there, but then it breaks off for this parenthesis at verse 7 and following, and it talks about things going on in the heavenly realm.

It tells us of the dragon being cast out of heaven, and then once it tells us of his being cast out, it picks up the story of the woman again, repeating the same information that we had in verse 6, only in verse 14, and then resuming from there. So we have in this chapter a woman who flees into the wilderness, and we have the story from the beginning of the chapter to the end of the chapter, broken in the middle by a parenthetical section that tells us about something going on in the heavens. So let's look at this chapter.

Now a great sign appeared in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of 12 stars. Then, being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

And another sign appeared in heaven. Behold a great fiery red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems, which are crowns, on his head. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

And the dragon stood before the woman, who was ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she bore a male child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her child was caught up to God and to his throne.

Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God that they should feed her there 1,260 days. Who is the woman? Well, let's start with an easier question. Who is her child? Her child is not hard to identify because we are told about him in verse 5, he is to rule all nations with a rod of iron.

This is expected to be a recognizable statement from Psalm chapter 2, which all Christians believe is a messianic psalm, in which Jesus even speaks. In Psalm 2, verse 7, the Messiah is believed to be speaking here. All Christians at least believe this.

And the Messiah says, I will declare the decree, the Lord has said to me, that is Yahweh, the Father of Jesus, said to me, you are my son. Today I have begotten you. Now I just want to say that this statement, you are my son, today I have begotten you, is quoted in the New Testament and interpreted for us by none less than the Apostle Paul.

In Acts chapter 13, when Paul is preaching at Pisidian Antioch, he quotes this verse, in verse 33 he quotes it, and he said that as Jesus rose from the dead, it is written in the second psalm, you

are my son, this day I have begotten you. In other words, Paul interprets this as being a prophecy of the resurrection of Christ, not the birth of Christ. The word begotten might throw us off, but the book of Revelation in chapter 1 referred to Jesus as the first begotten from the dead.

His resurrection is referred to as being begotten from the dead. We see that in Revelation 1.5, from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born from the dead. So the resurrection of Christ is seen as a birth.

Likewise in Colossians chapter 1, in verse 18, it says of Jesus, Colossians 1.18, he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first born from the dead. Christ is the first born from the dead, meaning the first resurrected into the new creation, into the family of God, as a glorified son. In Hebrews it says that God, in bringing many sons to glory, made the first of them perfect through suffering.

But God's program is to bring many sons to glory, Jesus the first to be glorified, we afterward. He is the first born of this new creation, of this glorified new covenant creation. And so, when the psalm says that God says to Jesus, you are my son, this day I have begotten you, Paul, who sees theology the way I was just suggesting, sees Jesus as the first born from the dead and says that's speaking about the resurrection of Jesus.

And then it says in verse 8 of Psalm 2, God still speaking to Christ says, ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance. And the ends of the earth for your possession. Christ will inherit all things.

Christ will inherit the earth and the nations. And God says to Jesus in verse 9, you will break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Now, it says in the Hebrew, you will break them with a rod of iron.

However, in the Greek, in the Septuagint it says you will rule them with a rod of iron. And the New Testament writers usually quoted from the Greek Old Testament rather than the Hebrew when they could. And so, Revelation 12 verse 5 says this child was to rule all nations with a rod of iron following the Septuagint in Psalm 2 verse 9, a privilege given to Christ.

Now, it is true that in one of the letters to the seven churches, he told those that would overcome that they would join with him in his rule and that like him and with him they would rule all nations with a rod of iron. We see that in Revelation 2 where he is speaking to the church of Thyatira. Revelation 2, 26 and 27, Jesus says, and he who overcomes and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations.

He will rule them with a rod of iron as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces as I also have received from my father. Now, he quotes Psalm 2 about how he is given the privilege of ruling all nations with a rod of iron. He says that whoever overcomes will rule with me.

But it's clear that if they do, it's only as sharing in his rule. He is the one who is the king of kings

and lord of lords. And even if we share in his rule in the resurrection, we don't become the king of kings and lord of lords.

He will always be that. We may be kings, but he'll still be the king of the kings. And so, this child who is born in Revelation 12 is Jesus.

Now, the futurists sometimes believe otherwise in that they say that this is a reference to maybe a male child represents the Jewish remnant, maybe the 144,000, maybe the tribulation saints are represented by the male child. This is much too complicated, making much too complicated what is a very simple statement that would be recognized by the readers as a reference to Christ rather than some more esoteric meaning like that. Jesus is the child born here and we have thus returned to the beginning of the church age with this chapter.

Now, the child not only is to rule all nations, but he's caught up to God and to his throne. That is, of course, what we know to have happened with Jesus. After his resurrection, he was ascended to the throne and sat down at the right hand of God.

The whole birth and resurrection of Jesus are slapped together here without any real reference to his life. It passes from his birth to his ascension without detail except that he is destined to rule all nations. It doesn't tell about his ministry.

It doesn't tell about his death or his resurrection, just his ascension. Now, that's not because other things are not important, but they're not important to this vision. This vision has other interests.

The focus here is not to be on the life of Christ, but on the outcome of his ascension, his rule. So, we now can say one of the characters is identified. Now, what about the dragon? He's another character not hard to identify because we're told precisely who he is in verse 9. In verse 9 it says, So the great dragon was cast out.

That serpent of old called the devil and Satan. Alright, that's not ambiguous. He's three different identifications.

He's called the devil. He's called Satan. Satan is a Hebrew word.

In the Old Testament, it's difficult to know whether Satan is even used as a proper name. You find in the Old Testament a few references to Satan in our English version, but the Hebrew word Satanus means adversary. So, in the Hebrew, where we find the name Satan, it can be translated the Satan or the adversary.

The Old Testament is not clearly using it as a proper name, but the reason we see it as a proper name is because when it comes over into the New Testament, which is written in Greek, the Hebrew word Satan or Satanus is still used. In other words, it is not translated for us into the Greek as adversary. It is carried over in its Hebrew form as if it's a proper name.

And so, we recognize Satan as a proper name for this particular adversary. In the Old Testament, an adversary or the adversary is a translation of the word Satan and some Bibles don't even use the word Satan in the Old Testament because of that. They translate it.

But in the Greek, there is a word that is essentially equivalent and it's Diabolos or devil. Now, in this place, it says he's called the devil and Satan, therefore giving a Greek title to him and his Hebrew name. And he's also said to be that serpent of old.

It's here in Revelation for the first time that we learn that Satan was that serpent in the Garden of Eden. Interesting, we take it for granted when we read Genesis 3 that that serpent is Satan. We almost think that it calls him that, but it doesn't.

Satan is not mentioned. The devil is not mentioned in Genesis. Not mentioned in Genesis 3. There's only a serpent.

He's treated as if he's just one of the animals as the story is told. As you go through the rest of the Old Testament, the serpent is never identified for us as Satan, although there are references to Leviathan, that twisted serpent that will be defeated and so forth. But it doesn't tell us that that's Satan until we get all the way to Revelation 12, almost to the end of the Bible.

We finally are told straight out, that old serpent, that's Satan. And so we have two of the three characters positively identified. There's a woman who we have not yet identified.

There's a child of the woman and there's the dragon. The child is Christ. The dragon is Satan, who is the woman then.

Now, since Jesus is the one born of the woman, it sounds like the woman might be Mary. That's how the Roman Catholics take it. In fact, in the traditional Catholic art, it's not uncommon.

And if you go to Mexico, you'll see many statues like this of Mary standing on the sun. I'm sorry, standing on the moon, clothed with the sun and with 12 stars around her head. Because this vision of this woman is taken by the Roman Catholic Church to be Mary.

And reasonably enough, it seems, since she was the mother of Jesus and this woman gives birth to Jesus. But it's not that simple. Because later, we find the same woman fleeing into the wilderness and being nourished there for a period of time.

A period of time that I've identified as longer than 2,000 years or about that time. And even if I'm wrong about the number, there are statements out here that do not seem to apply to Mary. For example, at the end of the chapter in verse 17, it says, the dragon was enraged with the woman and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Now, I was not born of Mary. And I have the testimony of Jesus Christ. I'm a Christian.

I'm one of these offspring of this woman. I'm one of the rest of her offspring. But I didn't come

out of Mary's womb.

And the Roman Catholics would say, well, Mary's the mother of us all. That's why they call her the Blessed Mother. She's the mother of all Christians.

But wait a minute. She's not the physical mother of all Christians. And if we're going to make this woman having children that aren't her physical children, then there's no reason to make her actual child, her first child, to be her physical child either.

In other words, if these children are not her literal, natural children, then there's no reason to apply that connection to the first child either. The woman, I believe, is not an individual woman. But she is identified by the things that are said about her.

She is clothed with the sun, verse 1 says, and she's in the moon, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. This imagery should not be hard to identify because it is identical to the imagery in Genesis chapter 37, where Joseph is sharing one of his two dreams with his brothers, dreams that position him as having the destiny of ruling over his brothers. And he shares these dreams innocently enough, no doubt, but they don't see it as innocent.

They see him as trying to elevate himself above them, and it's not very tactful of him actually to relate these dreams. These are probably dreams he should have kept to himself. On the other hand, if he had kept them to himself, we wouldn't know about them, so it's just as well.

And in Genesis 37, it says in verse 9, then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers and said, look, I've dreamed another dream, and this time the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me. So he told it to his father and his brothers, and his father rebuked him and said to him, what is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come and bow down to the earth before you? Now, Jacob had no trouble recognizing the sun and the moon as representing Joseph's parents, and the eleven stars as his eleven brothers, perhaps because it was so similar to his previous dream, where the eleven brothers were represented as sheaves that bowed down to Joseph's sheep. But the point here is, the imagery in Genesis 37 is clearly borrowed into Revelation chapter 12 to give us the identity of the woman.

The sun, the moon, the eleven stars would be Jacob's, we could say Jacob's family. Jacob, his wife, his twelve children. Of course, he had more than one wife, but that's not, doesn't have to enter into our consideration.

The idea is it's Jacob's family. Joseph would be the twelfth star, of course. The eleven stars bowed down to Joseph, he would be the twelfth star.

There were twelve stars in this woman's crown. She is Israel. But she's not just Israel as a whole, because not all are Israel who are of Israel.

She is the remnant of Israel, because she is the part of Israel that's preserved when she flees into the wilderness. You might remember that what John has already depicted is the 144,000 who would be spared from this Holocaust. They escaped.

And how did they escape? Well, we know. They fled into the wilderness. The church in Jerusalem, the Jewish remnant there before it fell, escaped across the Jordan River into the wilderness area where they landed or stayed in a place called Pella.

And they were nurtured by God. That is to say, he kept them alive. I don't mean to say they received supernatural food like the children of Israel in the wilderness in the form of manna.

But here, the woman will flee from the dragon. Remember the dragon in Psalms and in Ezekiel is an image for Egypt. In this place, of course, Satan is the new Egypt.

The church escapes from Satan as Israel escaped from Egypt. We've seen that Christ accomplished a second exodus, and it was a deliverance from Satan and his power. But Satan here, represented as a dragon, is the same imagery which the Old Testament sometimes uses for Egypt.

The woman fleeing into the wilderness is like Israel fleeing into the wilderness from Pharaoh in the Exodus. And being nourished by God in the wilderness is very much parallel to Israel's experience of manna being provided by God to her. This imagery is intended to recall the Exodus.

But it's a different Exodus. It is the Jewish remnant who brings the Messiah into the world. It is the Jewish remnant who flees and escapes the wrath of the dragon.

And it is the Jewish remnant, not the nation as a whole, that is preserved by God. So we have, for example, over in Jeremiah chapter 4, one of what might be several Old Testament passages that convey the idea of Israel being like a woman pregnant to give birth. Sometimes she's giving birth to the Messiah.

Sometimes she's giving birth to the new Jerusalem. But nonetheless, Jerusalem or Israel is a mother giving birth. In Jeremiah 4.31, God says, For I have heard a voice as of a woman in labor, the anguish as of her who brings forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion bewailing herself.

The daughter of Zion is Jerusalem. In this case, the spiritual Jerusalem is depicted as a woman in labor. What would that labor be? Well, it is the labor that brought forth the Messiah and the Messianic kingdom.

It is the sufferings endured by the faithful Jews in the period before Jesus was born. They're like in labor. In Isaiah and Jeremiah both, there are frequent references to the sufferings of the Jews under the Babylonians and the Assyrians likened to men holding their loins like a woman in giving birth.

It's a very common expression in the prophets because the sufferings that the Jews were going through was like labor pains. And here, the Jewish remnant who are God's true people, not the whole nation, but the people who are faithful to God prior to the birth of Christ go through these horrendous labor pains to give birth to the Messiah. Now, the dragon is anticipating this.

He knows what's coming and he wants to kill the Messiah at the point of his birth. This we can see as having some fulfillment in Herod, certainly a very demonic character if you know about Herod the Great, how that he sought to destroy Jesus at his birth and killed a whole bunch of babies in Bethlehem trying to get at him. Failing that, Satan made other attempts on Jesus' life throughout his life.

People took up stones to stone him. Jesus walked through their midst and escaped because it was not yet his time. When it was his time, he was surrendered to his enemies.

And Jesus said to them when they came to a rest in the garden, this is your hour and the power of darkness. That is, Jesus was now going to succumb to the attacks of the enemy against him because it was going to fulfill a purpose. But we see the dragon depicted as posturing himself from the very beginning against the Messiah.

In fact, it may be that the sufferings coming on the woman are seen as the devil's way of trying to prevent the Messiah from coming into the world. The persecution that came on the Jews in the Old Testament era, especially in that shortly before the Roman conquest, in the Maccabean wars and so forth, the various times when people tried to essentially stomp out the faithful remnant. So the woman then I take to be the faithful remnant that brings the Messiah into the world.

Yes, Mary was part of that remnant, but she was not the whole woman, not the whole woman here. There are things that happen to this woman subsequent to the birth that wouldn't apply to an individual woman, but to the remnant. So the woman gives birth.

Oh, I should say this about the dragon. He has in verse 3, he's red, he's got seven heads and ten horns. If you bear that in mind, you'll see those same traits in the beast in the next chapter.

It also says of the dragon in verse 4 that he drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Now you might say, well, that's easy. That's when a third of the angels fell with Lucifer.

Well, the tradition that a third of the angels fell with Satan is just that, a tradition. There's actually no reference in scripture to a third of the angels falling. And just so you know what the scripture does and does not say in that, the scripture does say there are angels who sinned.

In Jude verse 6, in 2 Peter chapter 2 verse 4, it talks about angels who sinned or who left their first estate and are said to be in chains under darkness or in Tardis awaiting the judgment of the great day. It does not say how many or what percentage of the angels sinned. It just tells us there are indeed angels who sinned.

There's no place in the Bible that mentions a third of the angels doing anything, sinning or doing anything else. There's no reference to a third of the angels in the Bible. However, the idea that a third of the angels sinned comes from this verse.

This is the only verse. The entire doctrine which almost all Christians presume to be true, namely that a third of the angels fell when Satan fell, is based on this one obscure verse, that the dragon's tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Now sometimes stars in the book of Revelation are angels.

There's no question about that, because for example in chapter 9, verse 1, it says, I saw a star fallen from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit. And then in verse 11 of chapter 9, it says, they have as the king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, Napoleon. It sounds like this angel is that star that fell.

So a star here represents an angel. Also the seven angels, or the seven stars in the hand of Christ are the seven angels to the seven churches. But that doesn't mean the word star always must mean angels.

And in this case, there's reason to doubt it. And the reason is simply this. The casting of stars to the earth is an image that is here borrowed from Daniel chapter 8, in verse 10.

In chapter 8 of Daniel, it doesn't take any particular commitment to any school of thought to see that this is talking about Antiochus Epiphanes. I believe that a dispensationalist would see it as such, an Amillennialist would see it as such. It doesn't really matter what your viewpoint is.

You're going to recognize in chapter 8 of Daniel, in verse 10, the career of Antiochus Epiphanes. In 168, excuse me, 168 BC, he's the one who defiled the temple, put up an altar to Zeus, offered a pig there, and persecuted the Jews. That's where the Hasidim, the holy ones, the separated ones, arose.

Eventually the Pharisee party came out of their movement. But these people were willing to die for their loyalty to the Torah and to doing what God said. And yet Antiochus Epiphanes made it a crime, punishable by death, to circumcise your child, to own a copy of the Torah, to observe Sabbath, things that the Jews could not, if conscientious, could not avoid doing.

And therefore they fell by the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. He was a terrible tyrant until the Maccabean Revolt rose up as a guerrilla movement against him and conducted wars against him for several years and finally drove him out of Israel. But he was a terrible oppressor.

And it is in Daniel 8 that we read of him. He's a little horn that comes up out of the head of the he-goat. No, yeah, the he-goat.

And the he-goat is Alexander the Great. Antiochus was one of the successors of Alexander after his death and a ruler of Syria. And about this man it says in verse 10, it's Daniel 8.10, and it grew

up, that is the little horn, grew up to the host of heaven.

The host of heaven is an expression for the stars of heaven. And it, the horn, cast some of the host and some of the stars to the ground and trampled them. Now casting stars to the ground is not something that literally happened in the day of Antiochus.

He did not have that kind of power. He was a mere man. He could not bring stars down and throw them down to the ground.

It's what he did, however, was trample upon the righteous, the faithful in Israel. And those are the stars he cast down. And Daniel gives us additional reason to think that because in Daniel chapter 12, it says in verse 3, those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament and those who turn many to righteousness like stars forever and ever.

It is righteous people who are likened to stars in Daniel. It was righteous people that Antiochus trampled upon, not angels. And since the casting of stars to the ground in Revelation 12.4 is borrowed, the imagery is borrowed from a reference to Antiochus, the stars not being angels but people, then we could argue that the stars in Revelation 12.4 are also people here.

It's the same phenomenon. In fact, it could even be the same event. Because waiting for the birth of Jesus, the great trouble that came upon Israel was through Antiochus' epiphanies first, or principally.

And this could be the dragon sweeping these stars from the sky with his tail could actually be the very same event spoken of in Daniel where Antiochus, prior to the birth of Christ, persecuted the righteous Hasidim. In any case, it is not a clear reference to angels and it's not therefore possible to say with certainty anything about a third of the angels falling. It's all based on this one verse and one interpretation of this verse.

And by the way, even if they are angels, a third in Revelation need not be taken as a statistical, mathematical unit. It's more symbolic for a significant minority. So we see the woman pregnant.

She's in pain. The dragon is waiting to destroy the child. In the meantime, he's doing whatever damage he can to the Jewish remnant.

Finally, the child is born. He is not killed at the beginning. The dragon does not kill the child.

He is not able to get him until the end when he is crucified. He rises from the dead. He goes to heaven.

The details are passed over. Only what we need to know now is that the Messiah is reigning at the throne of God. He's caught up to heaven, to God, and to his throne.

Jesus has already said in Revelation 3 in verse 21, Revelation 3, 21, Jesus says, to him that overcomes, I will grant to sit with me upon my throne, even as I have overcome and am seated

with my Father on his throne. So Jesus, in his ascension, has seated himself with his Father on the throne. He's been caught up to the throne of God.

So we have the birth of Jesus, we have the ascension of Jesus, and we have the hostility of the dragon of Satan toward the faithful remnant in Israel, which were essentially the first church. They received Christ. The faithful remnant received Christ on the day of Pentecost, 3000, later 5000, later more.

Eventually, Gentiles got to be part of this too, and they were the rest of the woman's seed. Besides, she has additional seed. She is the faithful remnant of Israel, but she produces more offspring because it was the Jewish church that evangelized the Gentiles.

But that comes up later in the chapter. At this point, we see the woman has to flee into the wilderness. This, no doubt, corresponds with the flight of the Jewish remnant from Jerusalem before the fall of Jerusalem, because she remains in the wilderness for the same period of time that Jerusalem is trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, in chapter 11, verse 2, from 70 A.D. till the end of the world.

What this says is the woman is preserved by God, even though the nation of Israel comes under judgment. Now, it represents her fleeing from the serpent, and yet the disaster that came on Jerusalem is often represented as a judgment from God, not from Satan. But these need not disturb us.

Almost the agent of all God's dirty work is Satan. God uses Babylon. He uses Assyria.

He uses Egypt. He uses Satan. He uses evil spirits.

The Bible depicts all these things being the case. God uses these to be agents of his judgment. We could easily see that the horrendous things that were done to the Jews are more suited to the devil than to God.

In saying that it's God's judgment means that God releases the devil to do these things. When the Bible says, He sent an evil spirit, an evil spirit from the Lord came to Saul, it doesn't mean that God is on the same side as the evil spirits, but that they have no choice but to only attack people that God allows them to. They have to get his permission first.

Likewise, Job could not be attacked by Satan unless God gave him permission. Likewise, Jerusalem could not be destroyed unless God gave permission to the forces of Satan. The Romans were demon worshippers.

They were idolaters. They could be seen certainly as the agents of Satan in a different sense, but in an additional sense to be an agent of God's judgment. Both things are going on, Satan's malice and God's righteous judgment.

It's interesting to see that in Josephus, we are told that when Titus destroyed Jerusalem, he

believed he was bringing an end to Judaism and Christianity because the Romans didn't know the difference. They thought all monotheists are the same. Their confusion is forgivable.

It's true. The Jews and the Christians were the only people in the world that the Romans knew who were monotheists. In addition to that, they worshipped a Jewish Messiah.

How could a Roman pagan who doesn't know very much even about Judaism, much less about this new religion springing up in Israel, following a Jewish leader and believing in this Jewish God, how could they not see this as just an arm of Judaism? So, Titus thought destroying the temple would destroy Judaism and Christianity, which was of course a mistake. Christianity fled. The temple went down, but Christianity continued.

The Jewish remnant was preserved through that. This is what is I think suggested also in the measuring of the Holy of Holies in chapter 11, verse 1. It is measured for preservation. It's that part of the true temple where God is worshipped in spirit and in truth by the remnant.

The outer part of the temple is given over to the Gentiles. That is external Israel is trampled. So I believe this is really the flight of the Jewish remnant, the church in Israel, in AD 70 to a place of safety.

And then she is nourished in the wilderness. She is kept in existence. There still is that Jewish remnant alive today.

They're part of the church. And she is kept there alive rather than allowed to become extinct for 1,260 days. As I said, we pick that story up again from that point in verse 14, but now in the intervening verses we have some important information about what's going on in the sky, in heaven.

It says, in verse 7, war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out.

That serpent of old called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world. He was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ have come.

For the accuser of our brethren who accused them before our God day and night has been cast down. And they, that is the brethren whom he had been accusing day and night, overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them, but woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea.

For the devil has come down to you having great wrath, because he knows that his time is short, he has a short time. Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. But that's where we read of the

woman receiving the wings of an eagle and flying into the wilderness.

So that picks up again at verse 6. Now how does all this heaven stuff, this war in heaven and its outcome, how does that correlate chronologically with the story we've been looking at on earth? Well, we can answer that fairly well. Because we see in verse 13 that it is when the dragon is cast to earth, that's the end of the battle in heaven when he's cast out. It's when he finds himself cast out of heaven into earth that he now turns his hostility toward this woman and she flees to the wilderness.

Well that's what she did in verse 6. So the war in heaven occurs and the victory of Michael and his angels over the woman's flight. But how much prior? Well, we see this war in heaven between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. And there is a victory accomplished against the forces of Satan.

It is described as if the serpent is cast out and there is not any place left for him in heaven. This, remember, is a book written by John. And there is another important book written by John, the Gospel of John.

And in chapter 12 of that book, as in chapter 12 of this book, there is a reference to Satan being cast out. In John chapter 12 and verse 31, Jesus is speaking about his impending crucifixion. And of course the sequel, his resurrection and ascension, his enthronement and all that.

And he says in John 12 31, now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. Being cast out.

That's what we read of happening to the dragon in Revelation 12 and verse 9. So this war in heaven ends with the dragon being cast out. If the dragon is the same as the ruler of this world, and I think most Christians would assume that that is true. I do.

I mean Jesus mentions the ruler of this world three times. And it certainly looks in all three times like he is talking about the devil. Paul refers to the devil as the God of this world.

But the point here is Satan is cast out. Where? At the cross. Therefore the end of Jesus' earthly life is also the end of that war in heaven where Satan is cast out.

Meaning that the war between Michael and his angels, between him and Satan and his angels is taking place during the lifetime of Jesus. Both end at the same point. The ruler of this world is cast out when Jesus dies.

That's the end of Jesus' earthly life and it's the end of the war in heaven where Satan is cast out. And we have confirmation of that in Revelation 12 10. Because when the dragon is cast out, someone in heaven with a loud voice says, now salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ have come.

So salvation comes at the cross. That's when Satan is cast out. Strength and the power of Christ

and the kingdom of God come at that point.

And what else happens? The announcement says, for the accuser of our brethren who accused them before our God day and night has been thrown down. In other words, Satan has been thrown out of court. It's only in this verse in scripture that he's called the accuser of the brethren.

Although the word Satan means accuser or adversary like in a court of law. Like a prosecuting attorney who's accusing somebody who's on trial. Well, he's been doing that day and night before God accusing the brethren.

We see it in Job. He's accusing Job. We see it in Zechariah chapter 3 when Satan is accusing Joshua the high priest.

This is apparently the regular activity of Satan against God's people before the time of Christ. In the New Testament, he's able to be right there in heaven accusing God's people. Well, that's changed.

What has changed? Well, he's been thrown out. His case is thrown out. It's like the prosecution has been thrown out of court.

He's been cast out of heaven and he cannot accuse God's people there anymore. And why? Because their guilt has been dealt with at the cross. Because they are justified by God, none can accuse them.

Isn't that what Paul said in Romans chapter 8? Romans chapter 8 verse 33 and 34. Paul says, Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died and furthermore is also risen.

Who is even at the right hand of God who also makes intercession for us? Christ dying, rising, and ascending to the right hand of God and making intercession for us is the reason why no one can accuse us. No one can condemn us. It's Christ who justifies us.

Who will be able to bring any accusation against us, Paul asked rhetorically, meaning no one can unless they're stronger than God or more effectual in their accusations than Christ is in his intercession. So, the accuser, the brethren is thrown out of court as it were. Prior to the cross, he could bring legitimate charges against even God's people, but now he can't because they are justified by God.

And therefore in the graphic picture of the vision of Revelation, Satan is thus thrust out of heaven, no longer able to accuse the brethren. Not in heaven anyway. However, he's now come down to earth.

He's now living where the brethren are still living. And he is still an accuser. He's just not able to accuse them before God anymore.

He can accuse us to our own conscience, however. He can accuse us to us. He can bring condemnation and guilt and try to make us feel alienated from God.

This is one of Satan's major activities. You know, we might think Satan's main interest is just to get us to sin. But why should he care if we sin or not? The purpose of getting us to sin is to get us to feel guilty and feel alienated from God.

Actually, he doesn't care whether we really sin or not. If he can make us feel like we've sinned and get the same result that we feel guilty and alienated from God, he's happy with that. He just wants to alienate us from God.

And if our conscience is not clear, then he has done so. 1 John tells us, and to tell the truth I'm looking for the passage. I thought it was in 1 John 3. I don't have it in my notes.

But John says, Brethren, if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. They said, Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, then we have confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask of him, we receive because we keep his commandments and do those things pleasing his sight.

I'm apparently 320. Thank you very much. I thought it was in chapter 3. Very good.

The same author who wrote Revelation, by the way, tells us that our hearts are attacked by condemnation. Why? Because if our hearts condemn us, then we don't have confidence toward God. He says, if our hearts don't condemn us, we do have confidence toward God.

Why should the devil care about that? Because then we have faith and confidence and we ask and whatever we ask we receive of him. In other words, our prayers, which are always our weapons against the powers of darkness in this warfare, our prayers are effectual when our heart is clear and our conscience is clear. And so John says, listen, if your heart does condemn you, don't listen to it because God is greater than your heart and who can condemn those that God has acquitted.

So here we have the devil. It used to be that he could actually approach God with accusations against us. He can't do that anymore.

God won't hear it. God knows there's a finished redemption and atonement and forgiveness of sins. No one can bring any charges against us before God, but we're not so clear on that sometimes.

And sometimes we do feel condemned and the devil's quite glad to do so because then our prayers are weakened. If I feel like, gosh, I think God's not really happy with me, I'm not going to come boldly before the throne of grace and expect my faith to see them answered. That's what the devil would like.

He's still the accuser of the brethren, but he's cast down to earth. He has to pursue his career as

accuser on earth to the inhabitants of earth. But the saints who are accused by him overcome him.

This is a major part of our warfare, is overcoming the accusations of the devil. Another part is, of course, penetrating his domain with the gospel and taking from him territory that he has held unchallenged for thousands of years. That is preaching the gospel and bringing the kingdom of God and the light into the dark areas where Satan has really held sway.

And so we see the warfare of the church broken down this way in verse 11, they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Now the blood of the lamb, how is that effective in spiritual warfare? Well, remember who we're dealing with. We're dealing with the accuser.

When he accuses you, how do you plead? You plead the blood. In a court of law, when you're accused of something, the judge says, how do you plead? He expects you to say, I plead not guilty or I plead guilty. Those are usually the two options.

But before the accusations the devil makes, we can't say we're not guilty because a lot of times the accusations are quite true. We can't say not guilty because that wouldn't be quite right. But we also can't say guilty because our record has been expunged.

The blood of Jesus Christ, his son, cleanses us from all sin. It says in 1 John again, 1 John 1. So John is telling us that we cannot be condemned if we are Christians walking in the light because Christ's blood cleanses us from all sin. So what am I going to do if the devil accuses me? Well, I don't say I'm not guilty.

Sometimes I have been guilty. Sometimes I've done the wrong thing. But it's irrelevant in a sense.

The plea is not guilty or not guilty. The plea is the blood of the lamb. That's of course the theology that's presupposed in that famous hymn, Just As I Am, without one plea.

Plea being a courtroom term. I have no plea to offer except that your blood was shed for me. That's the only plea I have.

I plead the blood of Jesus. Pentecostals sometimes talk about pleading the blood of Jesus in really kind of magical ways. They sometimes talk about pleading the blood over your house so that it won't burn down, you won't need insurance.

You plead the blood over your car, you'll never run out of gas. Plead the blood over your husband, he'll get saved. Plead the blood over your wallet and over your kids and you'll never go broke and your kids will never rebel.

There's all this magical blood of Jesus stuff that some Pentecostals get into. In fact I was teaching on spiritual warfare in a Korean YMN base in Toronto and I was making this very point

and one of the staff members said, Steve you might not know but in Korea it's a very strong thing among the Christians to be pleading the blood over everything and what you're saying is really relevant to them. I didn't know that was true in the culture of the Christians in Korea but I've certainly seen it in America, not so much in recent years but back in the 70s there was this book called The Power in the Blood and it was all about pleading the blood like a magic charm over everything to keep the devil away.

It's like you get this invisible shield over you that the devil can't penetrate when you're pleading the blood. Well that's not exactly taught anywhere in scripture. In fact nothing even remotely like that is taught in scripture.

The blood of Jesus doesn't work like magic. It is an atoning price that was paid for the cancellation of earned punishment. It is in other words our plea in court.

When the accuser accuses us we overcome him by the blood of the lamb. His condemnation, his accusation is conquered by the blood of Jesus. But the saints also overcome him by the word of their testimony which in revelation is the preaching of the gospel.

And in this we see the saints not only defend themselves against accusations but they go out to the devil's territory and defeat him in hand-to-hand combat taking territory that he has once held and bringing it to Christ through the preaching of the gospel. That is every time people come to Christ through the preaching of the gospel Satan has lost territory that he used to own or at least used to control. And so the spiritual warfare like most warfare has a defensive and an offensive campaign.

The defensive is to try to keep the flaming darts from killing you. That's why you have armor. That's why the blood of the lamb is there to protect your heart from condemnation and that which would keep you from having effective confidence toward God.

But then there's the offensive aspect where we go out to where the devil lives and we know where he sleeps and we go knock on his door and we say excuse me I'm here to clean out your house. I'm here to spoil your goods. And so preaching the gospel, taking souls away from Satan and giving them to Christ, this is the offensive aspect of warfare.

The warfare is both ways and the saints overcome Satan eventually through these means and by not loving their lives to the death. So the heavens are rejoicing because they understand all of this but the people on earth they need to get a grip on this because the devil has come down to them being wrathful and he knows he's got limited time. How long? We don't know.

But it's not unlimited time. His time is short. Shorter than what? Shorter than it was before.

He used to have as it were an open ended tenure of ruling over the nations but now Christ has sent the gospel to the nations and a commission to disciple the nations. Satan's ability to continue to deceive is limited now in a way that it was not before. It was never challenged before.

Now he's desperately trying to hold on to territory that he once held without a fight. And his time is not what it once was. He does not have a lot of leisure left.

And so when the dragon saw that he'd been cast to the earth, which was at the cross, he persecuted the Christian church in Jerusalem. Stephen got stoned. James got beheaded.

Peter got arrested. Saul of Tarsus was sent out to kill or to arrest Christians, bring them back to be killed to Jerusalem. He got saved.

Other people went out after him. Satan attacked the Jewish remnant, the church, but they escaped. His ultimate attack was the destruction of Jerusalem but the remnant got away and have survived until this time.

Now in verse 15 it says, So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman that it might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

What's this referred to? Well, the clue is that the water of the flood came out of his mouth. There's something comes out of Jesus' mouth in some of the visions in Revelation and that is a sword comes out of his mouth. It's clear that the sword that comes out of his mouth is his word which is like a sharp two-edged sword.

What comes out of the devil's mouth? Lies. As John 8.44 says, he's the father of lies. When he lies, he speaks of his own resources.

He is a liar. Out of the abundance of his heart, his mouth speaks lies. This is a flood of lies and deception.

You see, he's been using force and intimidation but that hasn't worked. So he now tries lies. There are two primary dangers the early church faced and still the church today faces.

The first of them was outright persecution from the Roman emperors and from the Jewish authorities. That is people trying to kill him. Persecution.

The other was error, heresy, perversion. And the early church battled heresy from the time of the apostles on. The Judaistic heresy, the Gnostic heresies that were creeping into the church and it was, I mean, the reason we have all the epistles of Paul is because there was this attack on the church in the form of heresy.

And Paul had to battle those heresies in his epistles. Kept him busy fighting this war of truth against error. The devil sent out a flood out of his mouth to try to sweep away the church.

Now it says the earth opened up its mouth and swallowed the flood. It's tempting to think of this as saying, well, the church didn't buy it but the, you know, they swallowed, the world swallowed his lies. Maybe so.

But it may be also just the earth opening is intended to be an example, again, from the Exodus because the earth opened up to swallow the opposition that came against Moses and Aaron. Korah's rebellion. And it may be just another image from the Exodus indicating that God supernaturally preserved the church in spite of even this threat.

By the way, another reference to the Exodus is in verse 14. We passed over it. It says the woman was given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness.

The wings of the eagle are a reference to God bringing Israel out of Exodus. God says, I'm the one who brought you out of Egypt on eagles' wings. Someone have that reference? Anyone have that? Is it 19.4? Yes, it is.

Thank you. Chapter 19.4. Thank you, Mike. You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself out here in the wilderness at Mount Sinai.

He carried Israel on eagles' wings out into the wilderness in the Exodus. And that's the imagery that Revelation uses. The woman was given two wings of a great eagle and she might fly into the wilderness.

So there's all this imagery of the Exodus, but of course it's not the old Exodus, it's the new. And it's the salvation of the remnant of Israel despite the hostility of the dragon who tried to kill Christ and did, but lost him when he ascended into heaven and then conducted his warfare against the church once he was himself cast out of heaven. In verse 17 it says the dragon was enraged with the woman and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Who might that be? Well, the woman is the remnant of Israel who believed in Christ. Who's the rest of her children? Obviously the Gentiles who are not the remnant of Israel, but who are part of her family now. People who testify about Jesus Christ and keep the commandments of God, obviously a reference to the church.

So the chapter closes with a warfare continuing against the church. Jerusalem is fallen. God's people are being preserved for the remainder of the time from that time until the end, 1260 days or time times and half a time.

And during that time it's a time of warfare. And we read in chapter 13 that that time of warfare involves two particular enemies who are in league with Satan. Satan has tried force in persecution.

He has tried deception, religious deception, heresy. And thus he calls two beasts to his assistance. One of them a governmental system that uses force.

The other a religious system that uses deception and spiritual heresy. Those are going to be the two beasts that come out of the sea and the land in the next chapter. And that will be the last chapter that deals with this period of three and a half years.

But you can see each of these chapters has something different about that period that is brought out. In this one it's primarily the warfare during that period. And in chapter 13 it will be the main allies of Satan that he uses in that warfare.

So this is a depiction of an ongoing spiritual war through the age of the church. We'll have to wait and talk about those beasts next time however.

OpenTheo

Revelation 13

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses Revelation chapter 13 and its famous depiction of beasts. The common interpretation that the beasts represent the Antichrist is popularized in Christian movies and novels, but Gregg notes that the Bible itself does not use the term "Antichrist" in the same sense. He identifies political and religious imagery in the chapter, which refers to the end of the sacrificial system rather than a setting in the temple. Gregg also mentions dispensationists who associate the beast in Revelation 13 with the "man of lawlessness" mentioned by Paul in 2nd Thessalonians 2.

Transcript

Today we're looking at Revelation chapter 13, the famous chapter about the beasts. We often think of the beast as a main character of Revelation, and it is, but actually there are two beasts in this chapter. And there have been many, obviously, speculations about the identity of the beast.

We will have to see if we can sort through the options and find an answer from Scripture itself. Let me read the whole chapter. It doesn't take long to read the whole chapter, and it's necessary.

Ordinarily, I would just read the first part, the first ten verses, which are about the first beast, and hold off to talk about the second. But the problem is the first beast's identity is concealed in some of the things that are said in the latter half of the chapter. After we are introduced to the second beast, we get back some information about the first, which we need to take into our consideration right from the beginning when we're trying to identify who the beast is or what the beast is.

Then I stood on the sand of the sea, and I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard. His feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion.

And the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. I saw one of his heads as if

it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.

So they worshipped the dragon who gave authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast who is able to make war with him? And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God to blaspheme his name, his tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them.

And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If anyone has an ear, let him hear.

He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity. He who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on earth in the sight of men.

And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on the right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. His number is 666.

Now, the beasts, what are they? Who are they? When are they? Of course, the most popular view that's popularized in Christian movies and popular novels and things like that, and fiction, prophecy fiction and so forth in the popular evangelical culture, is that the beast is called the Antichrist. Now, the word Antichrist is not found anywhere in the book of Revelation, and therefore the beast is not referred to by that name. Actually, the word Antichrist isn't found either in the book of Daniel, in the Olivet Discourse, in any of the epistles of Paul, nor in the book of Revelation.

The only place the word Antichrist is found is in the short epistles of John. First John mentions the Antichrist twice, and Second John once. And in First John, we simply are told that whoever

denies that Jesus is the Christ, the same is Antichrist.

So anyone who denies Jesus being the Christ is Antichrist, and therefore Antichrist is generic, not reference to an individual. So the Bible nowhere speaks, never uses the term Antichrist to speak of one particular individual. Nonetheless, if this beast is persecuting the saints and blaspheming God and His tabernacle and those who dwell in heaven, then he certainly would be against Christ, and therefore could qualify as Antichrist, but to call the beast the Antichrist is misleading.

It's to use the word Antichrist in a sense that the Bible never uses it. It's better simply to go with what it says here, the beast. Now, in the popular parlance, the beast is a future Antichrist who will arise in the tribulation period, and will continue for three and a half years to be a menace to the world, and especially to the Christians.

The Antichrist's career has been mapped out for us in many popular novels and movies, none of which follow the Bible very closely, and most of which is entirely speculation. Nonetheless, I think even among non-Christians, the idea of a future beast or future Antichrist, and the number 666, is a fairly common concept in our culture of a future big brother type of leader, somebody who's a dictator, a tyrant, who rules over the whole world politically. And the second beast is generally understood to be a religious leader because in the later references to this second beast in Revelation, he is always referred to as the false prophet.

Here, we don't have the expression false prophet used. It's just another beast. But we do find him referred to as the false prophet.

For example, in chapter 16, verse 13, it says, And I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. And likewise, in chapter 19, at the end of the book, in verse 20, it says, Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet, who worked signs in his presence. So it's very clear the false prophet is the same one as the second beast because we are told in chapter 13, verse 13, well, actually the whole section here, but in the presence or in the sight of the first beast, verse 14, this second beast deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to in the sight of the beast.

So this second beast is the one called the false prophet who works signs in the presence of the first beast. Likewise, in chapter 20 of Revelation, in verse 10, it says, The devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are. So three times this second beast is called the false prophet.

Being a prophet suggests religious in nature. And the beast himself, the first beast, is almost always regarded to be a political figure. So we have a political and a religious imagery here.

So one of the most popular scenarios for the dispensational view is that after the church is raptured, if one believes in a pre-tribulation rapture, or even if one believes in the mid-

tribulation rapture, this beast, this political leader, will rise. Many people say he will rise out of a ten-nation confederacy in Europe. Where do they get that? Well, there's no reference to a ten-nation confederacy in Europe.

However, this beast does have ten horns. And we are told in chapter 17, verse 12, And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. So ten kings, ten horns.

Many believe this is to be associated with the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw in Daniel chapter 2. The head of gold, a chest of silver, a belly of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of a mixture of iron and clay. And many have suggested that the feet represent a revived Roman Empire in the end times. And since it's a human image, it is assumed that it has ten toes.

And therefore the ten toes are thought to be the ten nations, represented here by the ten horns, that make up a last days confederacy in Europe, in the end times. What many call a revived Roman Empire. This is the popular view of the dispensationalists.

On their view, the Antichrist makes a covenant, actually at the beginning of the tribulation, a seven-year pact with Israel, which allows them to rebuild their temple. But in the middle of that seven years, in the middle of the tribulation, he breaks his promise. And then he shows himself to be the monster that he really is.

And he persecutes the Jews. He sets up an image of himself in the temple, which some people identify as the abomination of desolation. I'm assuming that anyone who's been an evangelical for very long, and has read books or heard preachers on the radio, is familiar with most of what I've just described.

None of it is in the Bible. There's no reference to an Antichrist making a seven-year covenant with anybody. There's no reference to an Antichrist setting up an image of himself in the temple, ever.

No reference in the Bible at all to that. Now, where do they get that? The idea of a seven-year covenant comes from Daniel chapter 9 and the 70 weeks of Daniel. We will not be looking at that tonight.

We don't have time. But in the 70 weeks of Daniel, each week is seven years. And after 69 weeks, the Messiah is cut off.

And then it says, the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. But then it says, and he will make a covenant, or confirm the covenant with many for one week, meaning seven years. But in the midst of the week, he should cause the sacrifice and offerings to cease.

This he, in Daniel 9, is thought to be the Antichrist by dispensational teachers. However, there is no reference to the Antichrist anywhere else in that chapter. Therefore, it would seem strange

for the word he, a pronoun, to refer to somebody who has never been mentioned previously.

He usually refers back to an antecedent noun. And the antecedent noun in Daniel 9 is the Messiah. One only has to look and see.

There is no reference to an Antichrist in Daniel 9. But there is, prior to this word he, twice in the previous two verses, the Messiah is mentioned. Therefore, the most natural understanding is the Messiah makes the covenant with many for seven years, which would be at the beginning of his ministry. But it says, in the midst of the week, that is after three and a half years, he brings an end to the sacrificial system.

That Jesus did, of course, when he died. His death brought an end to the sacrificial system. And therefore, in the midst of the week, he caused the sacrifice and offerings to cease.

That is, as a legitimate means of worshiping God. Now, therefore, there is no reference to an Antichrist in Daniel 9. The only covenant of seven years mentioned is the one that the Messiah makes in Daniel 9. And what about this idea of setting up an image of himself in the temple, rebuilt temple? Well, this is what the dispensations say is what causes the sacrifices and offerings to cease. They believe the Antichrist has made the covenant for seven years, and in the middle of that week, three and a half years, he causes the sacrificial practices to stop by defiling the temple as Antiochus Epiphanes did in 168 BC.

Antiochus Epiphanes, you know, sacrificed a pig in the temple in Jerusalem, defiling it, and that brought an end temporarily to the sacrificial system until the Jews could overthrow Antiochus and rededicate the temple, which is what Hanukkah is all about. But the point is, there is no reference in the Bible to the beast setting up an image of himself in the temple. So where do they get that? There are two verses, two places, one in 2 Thessalonians 2 and one in this chapter that they merge, although it's not obvious that the two chapters are talking about the same person, nor about the same subject.

In this chapter, we read the second beast causes an image of the first beast to be made in verse 15. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the first beast, which he made in verse 14, and to require all people to worship the image of the beast. So okay, we have got an image of the beast, and everybody's supposed to worship him, but there's no reference to a temple, there's no reference to Jerusalem, there's no reference to anything like that.

We've got an image, for all we know it might be in New York City or Rome or Zimbabwe, we don't know where the image is, but the image is created and everyone has to worship it. There's no reference to Jerusalem or the temple. However, if you turn over to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, we have Paul's discussion about somebody that he refers to as the son of perdition and the man of lawlessness.

Now, dispensationists identify this character with the antichrist also. That is, dispensationists believe that the man of lawlessness that Paul talks about in 2 Thessalonians 2 is also the first

beast of Revelation 13. There's no obvious warrant for this identification.

Both of them are bad, and I guess that they have in common, and therefore one could say that, but there's really nothing in 2 Thessalonians that ties the man of lawlessness with the beast of Revelation. And in my opinion, they are not identical, but on the assumption that they are. It is said about the man of lawlessness that it says in verse 4, he opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

It is this verse combined with chapter 13 and verse 14 of Revelation that causes people to say he's going to put an image of himself in the temple. You've got an image, sure, in chapter 13 of Revelation. No temple, though.

Here you have a temple, but no image. Here the man of sin sits himself in the temple of God. No image is mentioned.

Furthermore, this mention of the temple of God need not imply that there is going to be a rebuilt Jewish temple. This idea that the Jews are going to rebuild the temple, and they're going to do so with the permission of a future Antichrist, and then he's going to betray them by putting his image in the temple, is all a fabrication, come up with that kind of six verses on miscellaneous subjects into different places in a timeline that makes sense to some people. It made sense to me for many years.

I taught it myself. That's why I'm able to teach it now, although I don't believe it. But I know it like the back of my hand.

I taught it for many years. That's what dispensationalists teach, and I was a dispensationalist for many years. But what happens, I decided to ask myself whether there was a biblical basis for any of these things, and when I looked for the actual basis, I was shocked to find how much assumption was being made, and things were added.

For example, like I said, 2 Thessalonians doesn't mention anything about an image. It mentions a man sitting in the temple. No image is ever mentioned as being in a temple in the New Testament.

However, we should understand too that when Paul uses the expression temple of God, he is not referring to a Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Paul uses the expression temple of God in two other places. He does not refer to the temple in Jerusalem when he uses that expression.

Paul never referred to the Jewish temple as the temple of God, but he did refer to the temple of God elsewhere. 1 Corinthians, for example, chapter 3, 1 Corinthians 3, 16, he says, Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Who's you? Plural, the church. He also said of the church in verse 9, We are God's fellow workers.

You, the church, are God's field. You are God's building. What kind of building? A temple.

The church is being built up of living stones into a holy temple in the Lord, Paul said in Ephesians 2. And here he says, You, the church, are the temple of God. That's the same phrase he uses in 2 Thessalonians. Then in 2 Corinthians, chapter 6, he says in verse 16, What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.

Now when he says the temple of God, he means you, the church. What does the temple of God have in agreement with idols? You are the temple of God. You're the temple of the living God, the church.

So three times in Paul's writings he uses the term temple of God. Twice he clearly identifies the temple of God as the church. The other time he does not say whether it's the church or something else.

But it's already Paul's established usage to refer to the church as the temple of God. And therefore to say that man of sin sits in the temple of God, coming from Paul as it does, would more likely mean he sits in the church than in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, which never is called a temple of God, and is never predicted to be rebuilt. Not in the New Testament, it is not.

So, all the things we've been told, when you go looking for them in the Bible, are extremely difficult or impossible to find. In fact, the very suggestion that this beast is a future entity arising in the end times is extremely hard to justify, especially in view of the fact that John told his readers that he's writing about things that must shortly come to pass. Of course, we did decide, at least I did in my teaching, I've shared with you, that chapters 11, 12, and 13, which contain references to this period of 42 months, or 1260 days, frequently repeated in those three chapters, that that refers to things through the entire age of the church.

We deduced that partly from the fact that chapter 11 of Revelation, verse 2, said that the Gentiles will tread Jerusalem underfoot for 42 months. That's the same length of time the beast blasphemes here. Revelation 11, 2. But we also cross-referenced that with Luke 21, 23, where Jesus said Jerusalem will be trodden underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

So that the 42 months appears to be shorthand for, and symbolic for, the times of the Gentiles, however long those may last. My suggestion, and we won't go over it again, not the reasons again, we've done that more than once already in this series, I believe the 42 months, so-called three-and-a-half years, is a symbolic number. And what it refers to, symbolically, is the period from AD 70, when the temple, in fact, was destroyed, until the end of the world, when the seventh trumpet sounds, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

That's my thesis, which you are welcome to reject in favor of a better one, if you have one. But that is my position, and therefore the beast who blasphemes for 42 months would be some entity that endures the entire period of time, that we're calling the church age, or the times of the Gentiles, as Jesus referred to it. This means that I don't agree with preterists on this either,

although, as you know, I'm a partial preterist with reference to Revelation.

I believe parts of the book of Revelation are about things that happened in AD 70. In fact, I think the majority of the book is on that subject. But the section in the middle that we're looking at now, I believe, is an exception, and is looking at the longer view from AD 70 to the end of the world, and looking at features of that.

So I don't, like some people do, identify the beast with some character in the first century. I sort of do, but not exactly. Now if that sounds waffly, let me give you what I'm saying here.

Let's look at the beast and see who he is, and we can tell you why I take the view I do. Chapter 13 begins, Then I stood on the sand of the sea. Now that's the King James and the New King James say, I. The Alexandrian text says, he, meaning the dragon who was last mentioned, who in chapter 12 verse 17 had gone to make war with the woman and the rest of her seed, who have the testimony of Jesus and who keep the commandments of God, that he, the dragon, stood on the sand of the sea and apparently beckoned this creature out of the sea to be an ally in his war against the saints.

He beckons two allies, one from the sea, which is the first beast, the other from the land, which is the second beast, as verse 11 says, I then saw another beast coming up out of the earth. So, you've got a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. These are allies of the dragon.

They are thrown into the lake of fire together. The three of them have three evil spirits like frogs coming out of their mouths and they work together in concert. So we have the dragon and his two tools that he uses.

One of them the first beast, one the second beast. The first one political and the second one religious. But who are they or what are they? Now we have some clues given to us by the fact that the beast that comes out of the sea here has seven heads and ten horns.

Later we will be told in chapter 17 that the seven heads are seven hills upon which the harlot sits and that they are also seven kings, which is confusing because the seven heads do double duty as symbols of kings and of hills. But then, or mountains it says, seven mountains not hills. And then the ten horns, they're ten kings.

So you've got 17 kings all together here mixed together in this beast. Sounds like it's not just one governmental system but many. But he goes on to say in verse 2, The beast which I saw was like a leopard.

His feet were like the feet of a bear. His mouth like the mouth of a lion. Now these three beasts, a bear, a leopard and a lion, and one with ten horns are seen as separate beasts in Daniel chapter 7 and they come out of the sea also like this beast does.

If you look at Daniel chapter 7, the beginning of that chapter, Daniel 7, 1 says, In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed.

Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts. Daniel spoke, saying, I saw in my vision by night, and behold, four winds of the heaven were stirring on the great sea.

Now it's interesting because back in Revelation 7, 1, before the 144,000 were sealed, it says, there was a command given to the four angels of the four winds to not blow on the sea or on the land or anything else, not to stir things up yet until the 144,000 had been sealed on their foreheads. Now, verse 3, and the four great beasts came up out of the sea, each different from the other. The first was like a lion.

In verse 5, suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. In verse 6, after this I looked and there was another, like a leopard. In verse 7, after this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong, had huge iron teeth, it was devouring, et cetera, et cetera, and at the end of verse 7 it says he had ten horns.

So we've got four different beasts. One's like a lion, one's like a bear, one's like a leopard, and one has ten horns. This beast in Revelation has all the features.

He's like a leopard, he's got feet like a bear, a mouth like a lion, and he's got ten horns. And throw into that seven heads too. This beast is symbolic as are Daniel's beasts.

But for what? Daniel's beasts, as we know, as we read on in the chapter 7 of Daniel, are seven empires, I mean four empires, excuse me, in Daniel 7. Four successive empires. The first is Babylon. The second is generally believed by evangelical scholars as Media-Persia, which conquered the Babylonian Empire.

The third is the Grecian Empire under Alexander the Great, which conquered the Persian Empire. And then the fourth is the Roman Empire. So these four beasts are four empires, Gentile empires.

As they come out of the sea, the sea seems to represent the Gentile world. So this beast looks like it's kind of the composite of all of them. And as such, I'm going to suggest that it represents any government, any Gentile nation, any political system, which embodies or is an embodiment of the dragon, Satan, and persecutes the church at any time during the 42 months.

We remember when we first saw the dragon in chapter 12, we were told that the dragon was fiery red, had seven heads and ten horns. This is chapter 12, verse 3. The dragon who is Satan has seven heads and ten horns in the vision and is red. This beast is also red.

We're not told that in chapter 13, but we are told that in chapter 17, in verse 3. The same beast is described, Revelation 17, 3. He carried me away in the spirit to a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet, that's red, beast, which is full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. This beast is the same color, same number of heads, same number of horns as the dragon. He's just the dragon with skin on.

He's the dragon incarnated in a political system. To suggest the beast in Revelation is a man is

rather strange because, first of all, none of the beasts in Daniel are a man. They're all systems.

And this beast seems to be a combination of all the systems, therefore representing, it would seem, governments in general at any time that the devil incarnates himself to persecute the church. There have been many. I believe that there are some today, of course.

I believe that throughout the entire church age, there are governments that persecute the church. As we speak, the Chinese and the North Korean governments still persecute the church. Communist governments did in general in the 20th century.

Muslim governments often persecute the church. In the Middle Ages, many times the Papal States persecuted people like Wycliffe and Huss and Luther and others who wanted to follow the Scripture instead of following the Papal Church. And the states were under the control of the Popes and so forth, and so they persecuted the Waldensies and the Hussites and the others who were actually Christians.

Actually, the saints of the time got persecuted by these countries. In John's day, the Roman Empire did, and one Roman emperor in particular, I believe, who was Nero. Now, when we find the number of the beast mentioned in 666, I believe this is an allusion to Nero.

I've mentioned this before. He wants his readers to understand who the beast is that they will be dealing with. In verse 18, he says, Here's wisdom, let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast.

It's the number of a man. He assumes that his readers, if they're clever, will be able to identify the beast from this number. It obviously was somebody contemporary with themselves, or else how could they expect to be wise enough to calculate? I mean, if it was Henry Kissinger or Jimmy Carter or Ronald Reagan or any of the many people who have been suggested to be the Antichrist in our time, how would John's readers know how to calculate the number to get those names, you know? Obviously, John assumes that the beast that is being identified by this number is contemporary with his readers, and if they're smart, they can figure out who he's talking about.

Now, I believe the only figure, the only political leader in the first century that can reasonably have his name calculated out to 666 is Nero, Caesar Nero, and these words are translated into Hebrew. The Hebrew letters calculate or add up to 666. There have been many people in history in modern times that people have taken the letters of their names and found them to mean 666, but those don't live at the right time in history for this.

This beast, whose number is 666, is living in the time of John and his listeners so they could figure out who he is, and the only person on the historical scene that this could fit that I'm aware of from any commentaries I've read is Caesar Nero, and I believe it is him. I believe at the time of writing, the manifestation of the beast, the incarnation of Satan in a political system, was in Nero and his government. At other times, other persons in other governments are the

current manifestation.

The beast is a concept. The beast is the idea of the devil using governmental power, demonically inspired, satanically empowered to fight against the saints, that is against the church, to be part of the devil's warfare against the church. Nero was the man.

He was the emperor at the time of this writing, I believe, and therefore, he wanted his readers to identify who they're up against, and we would have to identify by other features than the number 666 because Mr. 666 isn't living today. But this beast, it says, had a head that was mortally wounded, but he lived. Now this imagery, the idea of a head wound, a mortal head wound, but the beast lives, has sometimes given rise to the notion in popular fiction that the antichrist will be subject to an assassination attempt to receive a shot in the head, a bullet in the skull.

This made a lot of people think at one time that John F. Kennedy was the antichrist. I remember after John Kennedy was killed, many prophecy teachers suggested that he's not really dead, or if he is, he's going to come back, and it would have marveled because he's received a fatal head wound, and he'll come back. I know that the Left Behind novels, although I have not read them, I've heard they have an antichrist figure who gets, I guess, assassinated or shot, and he recovers, and everyone marvels at that.

This is the typical dispensational scenario. The beast is an individual man. He gets shot in the head.

He comes back to life. Everyone marvels and worships him. However, that doesn't really fit what the imagery here is.

We don't have any beasts dying here and coming back. We have a beast that has seven heads. One of the heads gets a mortal head wound, but it's got six good heads left.

It doesn't die. There's no death of the beast in this. As a matter of fact, it specifically says at the end of verse 14 that the beast, it says he's the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived, not by a bullet, apparently, but by a sword.

But though he was wounded, he lived on. He didn't die. Why would he? He only lost one of his seven heads.

There's six more good heads to go. So the beast isn't an individual man who gets a head wound. It's a concept that one government goes down, but there's plenty of them where that came from.

The devil raises up a government to persecute the saints. That government has its career, and then it eventually passes into history. It disappears, but the beast never goes away.

The beast reappears. It's got many more heads to go. And I believe the number seven is

symbolic.

It's a symbolic number for perfection or completeness. The complete number of kings, the complete number of governments that will ever persecute the church is represented by these ten horns, and any of them might die, but it leaves plenty left where that came from. So this is the way I understand that imagery myself.

Now he blasphemes, and it says in verse 7, it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. The overcoming of the saints, I believe, is no doubt at the end of his career because that resembles chapter 11 and the two witnesses who I identified as the church. And in chapter 11, verse 7, it says, Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit... Now, he's the same beast, I believe, who makes war here with them.

He makes war with them, and he overcomes them. Okay, so a beast fighting against the church, able to overcome them briefly at the end of church history. But not permanently because they rise from the dead and are ascended into heaven in the rapture, eventually.

But the beast becomes the object of worship to everybody in the world, except those who worship Christ. And that's what we read in verse 8. All who dwell on the earth will worship him whose names have not been written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If you're not a follower of Christ, in other words, if you're not in his book of life, if you're not worshiping Jesus, you're worshiping the state, whether you know it or not.

Now, most people in modern times don't bow down to images of the state like they did in Roman times, but people do still have their loyalty primarily to the state. I mean, patriotism is the religion of people who have no other religion. How do I know that? Because they will die for the state.

Many people would never die for Jesus, but they'd die for the country. In fact, it's considered to be heroic. In fact, even the churches are very proud of people who go out and fight and die for the country.

And perhaps they'd be just as happy with someone who goes out and fights and dies on the mission field. But it's interesting that we make heroes of people who go and fight for the country. And the country is what? The country is the state.

Now, of course, the country is us, the citizens, too. And that's why we're so happy that there's some people out there defending us. No wonder.

I mean, we can't really be blamed for being happy that there's someone out defending us from bad people. The Bible says God has ordained the state to do that. But in Revelation, the state that God has ordained becomes an object of worship and a tool of Satan in competition with Christ.

And we see this, for example, by the fact that ultimately people are given a number on their

forehead or their hand, which is mimicking the Roman practice, which can be well established. I heard preachers say this for years before I looked it up to make sure it was right. I got tired of trusting preachers when they told me, well, in the Roman days, they did this or that.

I think, well, maybe they did, maybe they didn't. I'm going to check that out. I've learned not to trust preachers.

And I would encourage you not to trust them either. You can do your own research about this. I did that.

I looked it up. You can find plenty of verification of this on the Internet from historical, secular things about the Roman Empire. In the Roman Empire, a slave who ran away and was captured again and was returned to his master would be branded on his forehead or on his hand with like the owner's brand or name, like cattle are branded.

The forehead and the hand were particularly the parts of the body of choice because they are the parts least likely to be concealed in public. The hand is rarely covered in public and the forehead likewise. Therefore, at a glance, these people could be identified as slaves and of whose slaves they were by the brand upon them.

That's the imagery used here. The beast, his servants, his slaves, as it were, bear his brand on their head and on their hand. And that is in contrast with, if you look at chapter 14, verse 1, chapter 14, verse 1 says, Then I looked, and behold, a lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000, having his father's name written on their foreheads.

These ones were sealed. They received the seal of God on their forehead back in chapter 7. And now it's said to be the name of their father, the name of the lamb's fathers on their forehead. So you've got all people have somebody's name on them.

You've got to serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you've got to serve somebody. You're somebody's slave.

You either have the devil's brand on you or you've got God's brand on you because you're somebody's servant. Now, this is figurative, of course, because Christians don't literally have tattoos on their heads or computer chips under the skin or anything like that that have the father's name on them. Although people try to make this some kind of a modern technological thing, you probably have heard people say that the Bible teaches there's going to be a one-world monetary system without money, going to be a cashless society.

That's been said as long as there's been dispensations, I suppose. Where do they get that? Well, those who don't have the mark of the beast, we're told, cannot buy or sell. And that's the whole case for a cashless society that's ever been found in the Bible.

Those who do not take the mark of the beast cannot buy or sell. Now, futurists often, dispensationalists usually, believe that this mark of the beast is literally something put on your

body which is used for business transactions, for purchases and such. And it replaces cash.

When I was a teenager, the prophecy teacher said it's a laser tattoo. It'll be a credit number laser tattooed onto your hand or forehead so when you go to a store, instead of using money or even a credit card, you just scan your hand under the blacklight and it'll debit your account. So it's just like using a credit card but it's built in.

Well, in those days, laser tattoos were high-tech. Nowadays, nobody talks about laser tattoos or blacklights. That was hippie stuff, blacklights.

But nowadays, we've got sexier technology. We've got computer chips that can be put under the skin or on the forehead. So every few days, I receive someone forwarding me something in the email about how this is being planned already.

There's this RFD, is it RFD they call it? Chips that are radio frequency or something or another. Anyway, these chips, they say it's got to go under your hand or your forehead because that's the best place for something, recharging the battery or something like that. And they're going to use that.

How they're going to use a chip, it's not entirely clear. I guess scanning? And they always give examples of how there's this company in Florida that is already giving such chips to animals, pets, and so forth because it helps you locate them. And they're going to put all our medical records on a chip and put it on us.

And this is the Mark of the Beast. Well, so far, I don't see any comparisons between that and the Mark of the Beast except the claim that it will be on the hand or the forehead. And the Mark of the Beast is not about your medical records.

The Mark of the Beast is not about locating you when you get lost. The Mark of the Beast is not even necessarily about purchasing things with a credit number. It is true that those who don't have the Mark of the Beast cannot buy or sell, but it does not mean because they need that mark for the transactions to go through the bank.

It can easily mean that they cannot buy or sell. That's a specimen of persecution that they are, if they don't conform to the world and to the beast, people will persecute them, ostracize them, boycott them, and this has happened many times in the world. Many times in especially oppressive states, which were anti-Christian, there were actually laws made against doing business with Christians, selling or buying from them.

Actually, the Popes put out some papal bulls in the Middle Ages against the Waldensians. The Waldensians were evangelical Christians who didn't go along with the Popes. And there were actual papal bulls that forbade people to buy or sell anything with them.

It's a form of persecution. It's a form of boycott. Now, some might say, but why would that particular thing be mentioned if it's not about, you know, cashlessness? Well, you know, several

times, people who die for the Lord are referred to in Revelation.

They're always referred to as having been beheaded. And yet, not all people who die for the Lord are beheaded. A lot of people were beheaded by the Romans, the Christians, who were killed by the Romans.

Some of them were beheaded. Some were fed to lions. Some were, you know, killed other ways.

But they're always the ones beheaded for the Gospel. This is simply shorthand for saying martyred. It's like taking one example of how people are martyred and having it stand for all kinds of martyrdom.

Anyone who's beheaded for Christ, you know, has certain things said about them. Well, what about the person who was stabbed or burned or fed to lions? What, he doesn't get the same privilege as someone beheaded? Obviously, that's nonsense. The ones who are beheaded simply stand for people who are martyred.

The ones who are persecuted by boycott simply stand for the larger category of general ostracism and boycott and persecution of them as a class because they don't conform to what the rest of the world is agreeing to, namely the mark of the beast. But what is the mark of the beast then? Well, it's on the hand and the forehead. What does that tell us? Well, if you look at Deuteronomy chapter 6, it says in verse 6 and following through verse 9, And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Now, when it says the law shall be bound to your hands as a sign on your hand and between your eyes, on your forehead in other words, Jewish people, some Jewish people have taken this quite literally. They've made what they call phylacteries, a little leather box or pouch, and they put little scroll pieces, little scriptures written on paper or parchment, and they put them in these little pouches and they bind them with strings around their head. Maybe you've seen this in pictures of Israeli Jews.

Some of them have the phylacteries like a cylindrical little thing coming out from the front of their head and a strap around it. They're binding the law to their forehead between their eyes. They have scraps of the law there.

They do it on their hands, too. That's what phylacteries are. But I don't believe that this is what God had in mind.

That's rather a wooden literalism of bind the law to your hands as a sign and between your eyes. I think it's more reasonable to assume that what he's saying is I want your hands and

your full attention to be on my law. I want your hands to govern your works, your hands are your works, between your eyes where you'll see it on your thoughts, that your thoughts and your actions, your thoughts and your works will be governed by my laws, and that'll be a sign to people when they see you acting and thinking like me, like God.

When you see that my words and my revelation of my law are governing the way you think and the way you act, that will be a sign to people. And I believe that when the beast's mark is on the hand of the forehead, it has a similar meaning. These people think and act like the beast.

Christians don't. They think like their father. They have their father's name on their forehead.

And just as a brand of a master on a slave's forehead would immediately give away whose slave he was, so the behavior and thoughts of Christians should give away immediately whose servant they are. And likewise, those who serve the beast, their thoughts and their actions differ significantly from those of the believers, and that gives them way too. In other words, when people see how you act and how you think, they should know instantly whose servant you are.

If you look at Romans 6, in verse 15, Paul asks this question then answers it. Romans 6, 15, he says, What then? Shall we sin because we're not under the law but under grace? Certainly not. He says, Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey? You are that one's slaves.

Whom you obey, whether of sin to death or of obedience to righteousness. Now he says, You're either obeying sin or you're obeying righteousness, and whoever you're obeying is your master. Whoever you yield yourself to, that's the person you're that servant of that person.

Anyone can tell whose servant you are. What do you mean, can we sin because we're under grace? Are you under grace or are you under sin? Who are you serving? Are your actions sinful? Then you're serving sin. You're not under grace.

You're under sin. You're a slave of sin. You can tell by who you're obeying.

Who's your master, he says. And so also, in this picturesque way, using imagery which I think the Roman world would understand, perhaps more intuitively than we would, Revelation is saying, There are two kinds of people in the world. There are those who are the servants of God.

These have God's name on their forehead. And then there are those who are the servants of the system, the satanic system. Their loyalty is to the beast.

Now we're later going to find that the woman, who I would identify with Jerusalem, most people do not, but I think the woman who's the harlot is Jerusalem, is riding on the beast. Now you might think, well, the Romans and the Jews, they didn't have a cozy relationship. They hated each other.

Well, that may be true, but when it came to choosing between Jesus and the Romans, the Jews of his time said, We have no king but Caesar. Pilate said, Shall I crucify your king? This is the king of the Jews. They said, We don't have any king except Caesar.

He's our king. Well, they hated Caesar just as much as they hated Jesus, but maybe not quite as much. They'd rather avow Caesar as their king than Jesus.

And this is the Jews who hated Caesar. So, I mean, when it comes down to it, you have to serve somebody. You're gonna have someone who's gonna be your king.

Your ultimate loyalty is gonna be to one party or another, and it's either Jesus or it's gonna be really pretty much the state in all likelihood. And so people, their behavior, their thoughts are like a mark. It's like a giveaway whose servant they are, like a servant with a mark on his forehead walking through the streets of Rome.

At a glance, people could see who his master was. It's like it's advertised all over his face. It's written all over his face and his hands.

And so also who your master is is written all over your face and your hands. That is, it's written in the way, the thoughts you express and the way you behave. And I believe that this is the contrast that we see at the end of chapter 13 and the beginning of 14.

Now, what about that second beast? We'll just quickly talk about the second beast. There is a contrast, of course, between the first beast and the second. And as I said, the second beast is later referred to as the false prophet.

Now, a prophet is a religious person, a religious spokesman. There were true prophets, obviously, both in the Old and New Testament, and there are today. But there were also false prophets, the prophets of Baal.

There are prophets of all the false gods. And there were people who were falsely prophets of Yahweh. They spoke in the name of Yahweh, but they weren't really, he hadn't sent them, and they ran without being authorized.

They were false prophets. Now, the Old Testament never uses the expression false prophet. It just uses the word prophet, but you often read about prophets in the Old Testament that are indeed false.

They just don't call them false prophets. They say a prophet came and said this, or a prophet of Baal, or a prophet of the gods, or other gods. We can tell they're false by the fact that they're lying, or that they represent the wrong god, but they're simply called prophets.

And then there's prophets of Yahweh that speak the truth. But they're religious. They're religious leaders.

But in the Old Testament, all nations had their national gods, and therefore the kings always

had prophets on their staff. Prophets and kings were basically working together. There was a state religion.

And to be loyal to the king required being loyal to the king's god as well, the king's religion. That's why Jezebel, when she made Baal worship the official religion of Israel, she went out and killed all the prophets that she could find of Yahweh. It was illegal not to worship Baal.

Now, the priests and the prophets of the state religion enforce it. And I believe that just as the first beast represents political power manifested whenever and wherever it may be, when Satan is energizing it, Satan is using it, inspiring it. Although God ordained governments to do the right thing, governments almost invariably, unless something holds them back, like a conscience, they invariably become agents of Satan and do satanic things.

Now, you don't very often find a government with a conscience, so more often than not, God's minister becomes Satan's minister and eventually begins to persecute Christians and other people who are dissenters to the status quo. But not only is there the state power, which is the sword, there is the state religion. That is, religious loyalty is a factor, too.

I believe that the second beast represents false religion wedded to the state, which gives the state, as it were, its divine right to rule in the sight of the people. Now, I said that in Romans chapter 12, Paul did say that the state is ordained by God, but that doesn't mean the state has a divine right to do whatever it wants to do. And that's what states usually commandeer to themselves.

Put a man in power, and if there isn't something like a constitution preventing it, he's going to become an absolute autocrat. Why? Because he can. Because he can.

He controls the armies. You know, if one of the generals comes up and kills him and takes his place, whoever controls the armies can be the boss. And so the state's power is one of force.

But some states actually have the hearts of their people on their side. They don't have to force them with the sword because the people are inclined to worship them, inclined to think their country is the greatest country. Think of how it was with Hitler's youth and the Third Reich, how many people in Germany thought the German state is God's chosen people.

And, you know, to advance the cause of the German race and the German state and the German Fuhrer was worth killing off Jews, Gypsies, Christians, whatever gets in the way. Whatever the Fuhrer says is bad, we've got to get rid of those people. And it was like a religious fervor for the Fuhrer.

So also most governments, certainly pagan governments, have had state religions, cults of the emperor. Many of the emperors required that people worship them. And they had, you know, the priests of their countries requiring it, requiring people to worship them.

And so this second beast, it has two horns like a lamb, which of course the lamb in Revelation

being Christ suggests that this beast mimics or is a counterfeit for Christ or for Christianity. Christ is the one that is followed by those who are the true followers. That's what it says in chapter 14 about the 144,000.

In verse 4 it says they follow the lamb wherever he goes. But this guy looks a little like a lamb too. He's got horns like a lamb.

But when he speaks he doesn't sound like a lamb. He sounds like a dragon. Sounds like the devil.

Reminds me of the Aesop's Fable where a donkey found a lion's skin. And somehow he managed to put the lion's skin on top of himself and walk around and got a lot of respect that donkeys don't usually get because at first glance everyone thought he was a lion. And all the creatures that used to mock him as a donkey now are giving him a wide berth and deferring to him and treating him like the king.

He's feeling pretty good. He's feeling his oats, you might say. He decided to let out a roar of triumph.

But as soon as he did he sounded like a donkey again and everyone knew that he wasn't a lion. He looked like a lion but he talked like a donkey because inside that's what he really was. He had a costume on.

Jesus said beware of false prophets. Why? He says they have sheep's clothing on but inwardly they are ravening wolves. This false prophet has sheep's horns on.

He's dressed up like a sheep. He's got lamb's horns on him. But inside he's a ravening wolf or more like a dragon.

When he speaks it makes it clear what's really in there. And you can discern by what they say. You know, Moses gave a test in Deuteronomy 13 how to know a false prophet.

And it was interesting because it corresponds so much to this particular false prophet That is, if people would follow Deuteronomy 13 they would never be deceived by this particular false prophet in Revelation 13 because Deuteronomy 13 says if there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and he gives you a sign or a wonder now we haven't dwelt on it yet, we will but this false prophet in Revelation 13 gives signs and wonders. He works wonders and miracles in the sight of the first beast and everyone marvels. Well, here's a false prophet or a prophet who gives you a sign or a wonder.

Deuteronomy 13 verse 2 says and that sign or wonder comes to pass. So this is a real... it really works. He gives you a sign and it really happens.

Okay, looks like he's the real deal, right? Of which he spoke to you saying let us go after other gods which you have not known and let us serve them. Oh, he's speaking like a dragon. He calls

himself a prophet.

He does signs and wonders such as a real prophet might be able to do but when he talks something else comes out. He's saying let's go worship other gods, not Yahweh. And we're told in verse 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

So false religion often has many things about it that resemble true real faith, real Christianity, real religion, the real worship of God. Sometimes religions seem to have divine power associated with them. There are miracles worked in Hinduism and in Buddhism and in voodoo and in many other false religions.

I say miracles. It could be magic. It's something supernatural.

It's demonic. But the point is it impresses the people who can't explain the supernatural any other way than it must be God or the gods or something. And they don't realize it could be demons.

These beasts are more acting in the power of Satan. And it says of this particular second beast in Revelation 13 and 13 he performs great signs so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. That's what the two witnesses were able to do.

So he's mimicking the supernatural power of the church. And then we have this. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.

And he was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast. That the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. So one of the signs that he can do is create an image of the beast and give it life.

Make it seem to have spirit. Give a spiritual dimension to the political system. Imbue it with a religious spiritual essence.

That being patriotic is the same thing as being spiritual or being religious in this mindset. Basically, the deification of the state. It says he makes an image of the beast.

That means he makes an idol out of the state. Many people have made an idol of the state. They will sacrifice for the state, but they will never sacrifice for God or for Christ.

They'd sacrifice their children, send them off to war, but they won't send them to the mission field. Making sacrifices for the state you wouldn't make for God suggests that you've made an idol of the state. You put it above God, what is that? What an idol.

And then, basically, to enable the state through the state religion to enforce worship of the

state as if to give the image life. We've got to remember, Revelation's got a lot of sensational imagery here that has spiritual meanings behind it. If you take this literally, then you're a dispensationalist and you're welcome to, but I personally don't think that taking any of this literally is what is intended.

We've got imagery from Daniel, we've got imagery from other parts of the Bible, from Deuteronomy, and so forth, and I think that we're supposed to get an idea, not get a picture, and say this is a picture of what's going to happen. It's rather a description of how the state has its religious branch, its false religions, that cause and encourage devotion to the state, and they make the state into an idol to be worshipped, and almost like a living thing, a living God, to be worshipped, giving life, giving breath, giving spirit to the institution so that people don't think it's incongruous to pretty much put the state in the place of God. And so, at any time, and in any place, Satan may be using false religions and their adherence to states that are anti-Christian to help him in his war against the saints.

Remember, at the end of Chapter 12, the dragon was furious with the woman and went to make war with her, and when Chapter 12 ended, the war was going on. And Chapter 13, of course, there's no chapter divisions in the original, it just, we have, as he's warring against the woman, he calls up these confederates, the two beasts. Satan uses state power and false religious power in his warfare against the church.

The state power is the power of the sword. The religious beast is the power of deception. And these are the two things that the churches had to face from the very beginning.

Persecution of the sword and heresy. We saw that earlier, too, when the dragon spewed water out of his mouth in Chapter 12 and verse 15, out of the dragon's mouth comes deception, a flood of deception, heresies. But the church survives it.

But some don't. Some individuals don't. The true church survives.

The true church remains faithful to Christ. He's still their king. They say, we must obey God rather than men.

You see, the early church, as you may know, when ordered to burn incense as an act of worship to the Caesars, would not do so. And that's why they were fed to the lions. That's why they were burned.

They would not deify the state, which everybody else was doing. And everyone could see the Christians were different. And that caused them to be ostracized.

They were not, you know, admired for being different. They were feared, held in suspicion. When there were natural disasters, the Roman authorities said it was the Christians that caused it because they had angered the gods by not worshipping the gods.

When Rome was burned, almost certainly by Nero himself, he said the Christians did it. The

Christians became the brunt and the scapegoat for just about everything that went wrong and therefore were persecuted. And that has continued to be the case.

We have lived in a very unusual time in the past 200 years where a nation was established on the idea of religious liberty, where, first of all, Christians could not or were not supposed to be able to be persecuted for their faith. Furthermore, it was a country that was very largely influenced by Christian founders and Christian thinkers, so that we have lived in a very charmed bubble in this part of the world. And many other parts of the world have gone the way that America did following America, but then now they're going back again, and America's going back again, too.

Maybe we've had our day. Maybe we had our opportunity to sort of be free from the beast for a little while, the only people in history who ever were, and only for a short time. We've gotten spoiled.

Now if persecution comes, I've heard people say, you know, if there's not a pre-tribulation rapture, I don't know if I want to be a Christian. Ever heard anyone say that? I've heard people say that more than once. When I say I don't believe in pre-trib rapture, they say, well, I don't want to be a Christian then if there's no pre-trib rapture.

My answer is, well, probably you're not a Christian then. Maybe you got your wish. You don't want to be a Christian, you're not.

If you won't lay down your life, Jesus said, you aren't His disciple. If you don't come to me and hate your father, mother, wife, children, and your own life, also you cannot be my disciple. If you don't take up your cross and follow me, you can't be my disciple.

Well, if you're not willing to suffer for Christ, then you're not taking up any cross, you're not hating your life, you're not doing what Jesus said that takes to be a disciple, you're not a disciple. Being a Christian always meant being willing to die for your faith, and for most times in history, in most places, and including many at this time, that's exactly what people know it costs them. They count that cost because where they live, that's what happens, or at least that Christians are in danger of having happen to them.

And we have lived in a world, a part of the world, and a part of history that's been very unusual in that respect, that we've actually had some unusual freedoms. You may have heard there's some of those being taken away as we speak. Just a few months ago, a man, a father, homeschooling dad in Arizona, was put in jail for 60 days because he held meetings in his home, Christian meetings.

He wasn't bothering anybody else. The meetings were not noisy. He had several acres, I believe, and people parked on his property, not on the streets.

There was nothing about his meetings that interfered with any of his neighbors. And because he was having Christian meetings worshipping God, he was put in jail. That's been in the news a

fair bit.

And it's just the most recent of many. I've heard of cases like that since the 70s. But the government is not in favor of Jesus, unless you have people in the government who are themselves Christians.

And that hasn't been the case probably for a very long time in this country. I'm not sure if any of our presidents in the past two centuries are Christians. I don't know.

I know John Adams was a Christian. If you go way back, go way back and think there were a few Christians in there, and maybe there have been some in modern times that I'm not aware of because I don't know the religious convictions of each of these. But from what I understand, to get into the presidency, you kind of have to make some compromises that Christians usually, if they have consciences, don't do.

That's what Chuck Colson said, and he was pretty up there in the Nixon administration. Colson said, you can't really become a president without lying, without compromising. You pretty much have to be ruthless.

You have to not be merciful. You really can't be a very good Christian, he said, and really become a president. It's just the way the system is.

So even here, where the persecution is not great, or has not been in recent times, it still isn't a Christian state. And if we think it is, we're just probably trying to lull ourselves to sleep and think it's going to be okay after all. But the beast in Scripture is, I believe, still alive today in different forms.

You'll certainly find him if you go to North Korea, or China, or Cuba, or any Muslim country, or probably many other kinds of countries too. And you might even find him here, you know? If not so much now, maybe not too long from now. In any case, he has given power and authority to make war against the saints, and that's what he's doing.

He's an arm of Satan's warfare against the church. He's the political arm. There's also a religious arm.

And that's what John sees here, I believe. And this then brings us to the end of the portion of Revelation that I would call the little book, which was introduced to us in chapter 10. We will read no more in Revelation about this three and a half years.

It was first mentioned in chapter 11. It continued to be mentioned through chapters 12 and 13, and now that season is apparently done. And when we turn back to chapter 14, in my opinion, we're looking back now at the main theme of the book.

We've jumped outside the parenthesis in the middle back into the main subject matter, which has to do with the judgment of God on apostate Jerusalem in AD 70. And I will, of course,

defend that thesis as we come to the proper places next time.

OpenTheo

Revelation 14 - 16

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this segment of his discussion on Revelation, Steve Gregg delves into the symbolism of chapter 14, which follows the previously discussed period of 42 months or 1260 days. He notes that the group referred to as the "ones not defiled" are likely Christian Jews who have remained faithful to God. Gregg also references Hebrews 12, which mentions Mount Zion, and explains that the 144,000 are the "firstfruits" of believers in Christ. Ultimately, Gregg's analysis focuses on the idea that through faith and a righteous spirit, believers can be spared from the plagues and destruction mentioned in Revelation.

Transcript

We're picking up our study in Revelation at chapter 14, and that means we've just come through a segment, chapters 10 through 13, which is that segment that discusses a period of time that is called 42 months or 1260 days, or time, times, and half a time. We've spent a considerable time, and half a time, looking at these passages and looking at the things that are said to be associated with that period of time. I believe that those chapters are not talking about AD 70.

I don't believe those chapters are describing Jerusalem's fall. I believe that they are talking about the whole period of the church age ending up with the ultimate eschatological return of Christ. We have seen, for example, in chapter 11, what I believe is the return of Christ.

In fact, we've seen it more than once there because the two witnesses were caught up into heaven to the throne of God. I take that to be at the rapture, at the second coming of Christ. Likewise, in chapter 11, we saw the sounding of the seventh trumpet, also, I believe, a reference to the second coming of Christ.

So, this is what's behind us. We come to chapter 14 now, and I have said that I believe chapters 10 through 13 are like a parenthesis, which means we come back to the main subject. Once we exit the parenthesis, we come back to the main subject of the book, and I believe John has called our attention to that, or the Holy Spirit has done so in revealing these things, by reintroducing the 144,000.

Now, they are only mentioned twice in the Bible, once in Revelation 7 and once here. We read of them, Then I looked, and behold, a lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000, having his father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder.

And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. And they sang, as it were, a new song before the four living creatures and the elders, and no one could learn that song except the 144,000 who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins.

These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

Now, we encountered these people in chapter 7. There was not much told us about them there. Although much more verses than this were given to them, most of those verses were occupied by saying 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, 12,000 from the tribe of Judah, 12,000 from the tribe of Ephraim, and so forth. Twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes, that's what took up most of the verses in the first half of chapter 7. But we are told in chapter 7 that they were sealed on the forehead.

They received the seal of God on their foreheads so that when the trials were about to come, when the judgment was poured out, they would be preserved. And we found that when the locusts were released with the fifth trumpet, that they were told they could afflict all men except those who had the seal of God on their forehead, that is, except the 144,000. So the 144,000, like Israel in Egypt, when the plagues were poured out in the days of Moses, they were spared those plagues.

They were in the world, but they were not subject to the plagues because they were God's people. And therefore, the seal of God is the emblem of them belonging to God. Like a slave had his master's brand on his forehead in the Roman world, this would communicate that they are slaves or servants of God.

It also, of course, harked back to Ezekiel 9, as we showed at that time when we were in chapter 7, that Ezekiel 9 is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., when the Babylonians destroyed the city, as the Romans would do shortly after the time of Christ and the apostles. And in Ezekiel 9, in anticipation of the Babylonian invasion, he says that he saw six angels or six men in a vision with battle axes in their hands and a seventh one who had an ink horn. And he was told to go and put a mark on the forehead of everyone in Jerusalem who sighed and cried over the abominations done in that city.

So these were the faithful remnant. These were the remnant in Jerusalem who were sympathetic with God's cause. They hated the sin of the city.

They were like Lot in Sodom who vexed his righteous spirit day after day with their unlawful deeds. So there were in Jerusalem in Ezekiel's day some faithful remnant. And God, in this vision, put a mark on the foreheads of all of the ones who were of his sentiments.

And then he sent out the six men with slaughter weapons in their hands to kill everyone else in the city, but to spare the ones with the mark on their heads. So this idea of marking the remnant in Jerusalem before the destruction of Jerusalem comes from Ezekiel 9. And it is picked up in Revelation chapter 7. So we have the 144,000 marked before the judgment fell. And I pointed out at the time that the Christian Jews, the Jews in Jerusalem in the first century, fled Jerusalem.

This Eusebius, the church historian, has assured us. They were warned in advance that the Romans were coming. And so every Christian in Jerusalem fled before the city was locked down, before the siege.

And when the Romans besieged the city, not one Christian was left in the city. They were all spared this horrible judgment. Just as in Ezekiel's day, the remnant were spared when God destroyed Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

So in John's day, the remnant were spared when God destroyed Jerusalem. And that's what the 144,000 signified. Now here they are seen again.

So we're back to that timeframe again. And now they're seen on Mount Zion. And many people say they're in heaven.

Well, maybe they are in heaven. It doesn't necessarily say so. Mount Zion is not heaven.

Remember that in Hebrews chapter 12, it says that we have come to Mount Zion. We have come to the Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, which the writer of Hebrews refers to as the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are written in heaven. So our names are written in heaven, but we're not in heaven.

We're not physically in heaven. We're physically on earth. We are the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which the writer of Hebrews calls Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the church.

And he says, we have come to this Zion. So these 144,000 have come just like the readers of the book of Hebrews had come. Of course, the readers of the book of Hebrews were Jewish Christians in the first century before the destruction of Jerusalem.

And therefore Hebrews was written to these very people. And we see them on Mount Zion as the writer of Hebrews says they were. And they're singing a new song.

Now it doesn't tell us anything about the content of the song must be rather complex because no one can learn it except them. And I, I suppose what this means is that no one in Jerusalem

could sing this song except them because these were uniquely saved out of the city and their song was no doubt a song of salvation because it is said no one knew the song except the 144,000 who were redeemed from the earth. The fact that they were redeemed is mentioned no doubt because that has something to do with the content of their song.

They're singing about redemption. Now the really interesting parts of this passage are verses four and five where we are given more information about these 144,000 in two verses than in all the rest of the Bible combined. We're told in verse four, these are the ones who were not defiled with women for their virgins.

Now we have to remember in Revelation we're using symbolism. These are not necessarily literal virgins. To make virginity a qualification to be among the redeemed would be essentially to teach what Paul called doctrines of demons.

Paul said to Timothy in first Timothy four that some in the last days would teach doctrines of demons forbidding people to marry. Well if to be part of this company, if you had to be a virgin, you'd have to be forbidden to marry obviously. And certainly the Bible does not place a value on virginity over marriage.

And this is symbolic because the city is referred to as Babylon the harlot. And by contrast to the promiscuous immorality of the city and its spiritual adultery, these people have kept themselves pure. They are not defiled with the harlotry of the city.

And that's I think what is meant by virginity. They're pure. The language of course is that of physical virginity but as in most cases in Revelation these things are an emblem of something spiritual or something other than the exact thing they mention.

These are the ones who follow the lamb wherever he goes. This is an example of not saying things exactly as they are. Jesus isn't really a lamb.

Jesus is a man. He's God. He's the son of God.

He's not a lamb. But throughout the book of Revelation he's a lamb. It's symbolic.

He's depicted as a lamb and they're following the lamb. An interesting reversal of normal situations is usually lambs follow shepherds but these people are following the lamb wherever he goes. And this is simply a book of Revelation way of saying they're Christians.

They're followers of Jesus. We know they're Jewish from chapter 7 because they're from all the 12 tribes of Israel. Now we learn they're Christians.

So they're Christian Jews. And they are undefiled Christian Jews. And what more do we learn of them? They were redeemed from among men.

Well all Christians are redeemed from among men. So they are Christians and they share that in common with all Christians but it says they are the first fruits to God and to the lamb. Now

this is where I said this gives away the secret who they are.

They're the first ones harvested into the church. We know from church history that the first people to be saved were Jews in Jerusalem at the day of Pentecost. And for some time afterward all the converts were Jewish.

All of them were in Jerusalem. The only church for many years was in Jerusalem. It was a while before persecution and the death of Stephen drove Christians out of there to start churches elsewhere.

But the church in Jerusalem was the original first fruits of God in the first century. And James in his epistle is writing to Jews of the first century who are Christians. In fact in James 1.1 he says, James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes.

So he's writing to people from the twelve tribes. Well the 144,000 are from the twelve tribes too. We are laboriously told that by giving the numbers of each tribe.

So James is writing to believers in Christ who are of the twelve tribes. And he says to them in chapter 1 and verse 18, James 1.18 says, Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. So the Jewish Christians in the first century including James who was a first century Jewish Christian were the first fruits of God's creatures.

The harvest of course eventually involved many Gentiles. Many Gentiles were brought in too but the Jewish believers were the first fruits and that's who the 144,000 are said to be. They escaped the holocaust of AD 70.

They're Christian Jews of the first century, first fruits. And in Revelation 14.5 it says, In their mouth was found no guile, which is what Jesus said about Nathanael, part of the faithful Jewish remnant. In John chapter 1 when Nathanael was coming to Jesus he said, There's a true Israelite indeed in whom is no guile.

A true Israelite was one who is one inwardly, honest at heart. As Paul said in Romans 2.28, He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, he is a Jew who is one inwardly. And so Nathanael was an example of that faithful remnant in Israel at that time of whom Jesus said there's no guile, no duplicity, no hypocrisy in him.

You know how Jesus was put off by the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of his day and often called them hypocrites. Here was a Jew who was no hypocrite at all. He had no guile in him at all.

Well that's what made up the remnant. The apostate were the hypocrites. The remnant were the sincere, the unpretentious, the ones who had no guile.

And so this 144,000 like Nathanael who no doubt was one of them, in them was no guile. And it

says for they are without fault before the throne of God. So here we have been reintroduced to them and then we'll hear no more about them in Revelation or elsewhere.

But in bringing them up again as I said has brought us full circle back to the original subject matter of the book. Namely a judgment is coming on Jerusalem though God has selected his remnant and spared them. And here they are.

They're on the true Mount Zion. The physical Mount Zion is about to be disrupted and the city sitting on it burned down and destroyed. But there's a true Mount Zion, a heavenly Jerusalem and these are part of that community.

Now, the next vision and by the way this chapter is made up of a series of visions. I might just add that many have tried to find seven of something in this section because there's seven of something in most of the sections of Revelation. There's seven letters, there's seven churches, there's seven seals that are individually broken, there's seven trumpets that are individually sounded, there's going to be in chapter 16 seven bowls of wrath that are poured out individually.

What seven would we find here in this chapter? Unlike those other cases there's not a countdown. There's not a first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth named. The first one did this and the second one did that like there are in these other sections.

However, many have felt that this section is a section of seven angels and that's the first thing we see in verse 6, they saw another angel. And then in verse 8, and another angel. And verse 9, and a third angel.

That's the only one that's given a number but by giving it a number maybe we're tipped off that the number of angels is something we're supposed to pay attention to here. He doesn't say the first, second, third and fourth angel and so forth as he does with the other things but he's got one angel after another. And then you've got in verse 15 another angel.

And then 17, then another angel. And verse 18, another angel. It's starting to look good for this theory that there are seven angels.

The only problem is once you finish with the angels there are only six. There aren't seven, there's only six. Now there's another mention of an angel which is, was it 19? Right, but it's one of the others.

It says the angel, not another angel but the angel thrust in his sickle. He was mentioned earlier. And so he's the angel who's got his sickle in verse 17.

So he's the fifth angel repeated, mentioned again. But there's only six angels. But, consider this.

When there were seven seals, six of them, there were six of them were broken. And then when the seventh one was broken there was just silence. There was nothing.

And then the seven angels with the seven trumpets appeared out of the, as it were, out of the seventh seal. And then when the seventh trumpet sounded of course he, that was the end of the world and we started the cycle over again. Here it may be that just as the seventh seal was essentially the seven trumpets.

They were contained within the seventh seal. So the seven angels that have the seven last plagues to whom we will be introduced in verse one of chapter 15, maybe they are essentially the seventh angel. There's seven of them.

But it's possible that the seventh angel is divisible into seven angels just as the seventh seal was divisible into seven trumpets. Who are they? Well, verse six. Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven having this everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth, to every nation, tribe, tongue and people, saying with a loud voice, fear God and give glory to him for the hour of his judgment has come and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.

That's the first angel. And what's he doing? He's flying through heaven preaching what's called the everlasting gospel. Now when you read what he preaches, we don't recognize that as the gospel.

There's nothing about the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. There's nothing about repentance, whether it's believe or give glory and fear God. But the contents of this message are not what we would recognize as the gospel, but rather just an exhortation to fear God because his judgment has come.

But we're told that he preaches the everlasting gospel. So I guess this is a stylized kind of statement of the Christian church's message, which is the gospel. But is this the church? The futurist camp believes that there will be a time in the tribulation period when an angel or angels fly through the heavens and preach the gospel out loud, like with a loud speaker.

And when one argues that the church cannot be raptured before the tribulation because Jesus said this gospel must be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations and then shall the end come, the dispensational answer is, well, that's not a problem. The church can be raptured and the gospel can still be preached to all nations because Revelation 14.6 tells us there's an angel flying through heaven preaching the gospel during the tribulation period. Well, first of all, there's no reference to this being in a tribulation period.

I want to point that out. There's nothing in Revelation that says that we're reading about a tribulation period here. That's an assumption imported by dispensationalism.

But whether it is or not, it's not clear that we should understand this to be a literal angel either. Throughout the book of Revelation, angels represent concepts just like other things in the symbolism do. And I'm inclined to the view that this angel preaching the gospel throughout the world simply represents the preaching of the gospel throughout the world, which in fact is

carried on by the church.

The church is an angel. The church is a messenger. The word angelos means a messenger.

The church is God's messenger and the church does preach the gospel throughout the world. And to mention this at this point after the 144,000 is our scene is very much to follow the same pattern as Revelation 7, which after we saw Revelation 7, the first 14 verses where it talks about the 144,000, the next thing we saw was an innumerable company of people saved out of every nation, people and kindred in tongue who had been saved Gentiles. So we read in Revelation 7, first of the saved Jews, the first fruits of the harvest, and then of an innumerable company of Gentiles who are the result of the gospel mission to the world.

The gospel was preached first in Jerusalem and to Judea and Samaria and the outermost parts of the earth eventually. And so we have reference to the gospel being preached throughout the world as a, as something to focus on here before we look at the disasters that are going to be described. Verse eight and another angel followed saying Babylon is fallen, is fallen that great city because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Now Babylon is not mentioned previous to this in Revelation. Babylon will be described in great detail in chapter 17 and the fall of Babylon will be declared in Revelation 18. This is something of a preview, but one of the things that makes this difficult for a teacher is when we want to make sense of this statement, Babylon has fallen, we have to identify Babylon.

And for that, we need to kind of look ahead at things and kind of steal thunder from later lectures because we don't have any identification of Babylon here, just the announcement Babylon has fallen. He does say she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, but that's not much of a dead giveaway either. Babylon will be mentioned by name again a second time in chapter 16 and that's still before we really get the formal introduction.

In chapter 16 verse 19, it says, now the great city was divided into three parts and the cities of the patron of the nations fell and great Babylon was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. So we have the first mention in Revelation of Babylon is here when another angel is flying around saying Babylon has fallen. Then when the seventh bowl is poured out of wrath, then we read that Babylon gets her due.

But then in chapter 17, which follows these two references, we are introduced to Babylon as if we've never seen or heard of her before. John has taken out to a wilderness where he sees the beast and the beast is described as if we've never heard of it before either. And then this woman, this harlot who is said to be mystery Babylon, the mother of harlots is seen.

And then chapter 18 is all about how Babylon has fallen and who moans and who rejoices over that. So we will have more information about who Babylon is in chapter 17 and 18, but suffice it to say it isn't literal Babylon, just as so many of the things named in Revelation are symbolic names. So Babylon is a symbolic name.

In fact, we're told that of course, clearly in chapter 17, verse five, where it says on her forehead, a name was written mystery Babylon, not just Babylon, but mystery. It's a mystery. Who is this Babylon? This isn't historic Babylon.

And we find certain things about her that point us to certain directions. It is some city because it is called in verse eight, that great city. And in chapter 16, verse 19, it's that great city was divided the great city.

Now we have encountered the great city before in chapter 11. In chapter 11, in verse eight, we read about the great city for the first time, though Babylon was not given as the name of the great city in revelation 11, eight, it said their dead bodies. The two witnesses will lie in the street of the great city, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

So the great city is spiritually called Sodom. It is spiritually called Egypt. It is mysteriously called Babylon.

It is the great city that bears all the names of these pagan enemies of Israel and objects of God's wrath in old Testament times. But what city is it? Well, we're told in verse eight there of chapter 11, it's the city where our Lord was crucified. Oh, that narrows it down.

There's only one city where our Lord was crucified. That's Jerusalem. So the great city is Jerusalem.

It's spiritually called Sodom. It's spiritually called Egypt. It's also called Babylon.

And by the way, we are told later on, of course, that Babylon was guilty of all the blood of the prophets. Babylon was, she was drunk with the blood of the saints and the prophets. And Jesus said Jerusalem was the one who slays the prophets and those who were sent to her.

So Babylon, it sounds like is Jerusalem. Now, of course, it's more common for commentators to say it's Rome. Some of the description of Jerusalem or Babylon, excuse me, in chapter 17 has led people to believe it's Rome.

However, there's a problem because the woman who is Babylon in chapter 17 is seen riding on a beast who is often identified with Rome. The beast and the woman are not the same entity. The beast could arguably be identified with Rome.

The woman, however, is not the beast. In fact, the beast hates the woman and eventually destroys her. That's if you read chapter 17.

We won't go into it right now. We will later. Well, we can look at chapter 17, verse, um, 15, 17, 15 says, he said to me, the waters, which you saw where the harlot sits are people's multitudes, nations, and tongues.

Now she's sitting on the beast. The beast represents nations, multitudes, and tongues, and so forth. And the 10 horns, which were also part of the beast, which you saw on the beast, these

will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked and eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

Now the 10 horns and the beast arguably have identifying features that would point us to Rome, but not the, not the harlot. She's riding on the beast, but the beast hates her. The 10 horns hater, they turn on her, they kill her and they burn her with fire.

So Rome burned the harlot with fire. Now the giveaway of who she is, is in revelation 17, 18, the last verse in chapter 17 says, and the woman whom you saw is that great city. Well, there's that term again, but tells us this, which reigns over the Kings of the earth.

Now this statement probably more than any other has directed people to think it's Rome. Notice John is using the present tense to his readers. You want to know who the woman is? We've got this mystery, but I can tell you who it is.

She is that great city that is reigning present tense in John's day over the Kings of the earth. Babylon represented a city in John's day and his reader's day. He's speaking in the present tense.

This is who she is, but what city rules over the Kings of the earth? Well, one would argue in John's day, Rome ruled over the Kings of the earth. Therefore, the woman Babylon must be Rome, but we've already seen that doesn't work well because Rome kills her. Could she be Jerusalem? Rome did destroy Jerusalem and burned her down.

That fits. In fact, everything fits Jerusalem with the one difficulty that Jerusalem did not reign over the Kings of the earth. But I've pointed this out before to you, the term, the Kings of the earth, which occurs many times in revelation also occurs in the book of Acts, the same Greek expression.

And it's in the prayer of the disciples in Acts chapter four. In Acts chapter four, the disciples are quoting from Psalm two in their prayer. And in Acts 425, the disciples say, who God by the mouth of your servant, David have said, and this is where they quote Psalm two.

Why did the nation's rage and the people plot vain things? The Kings of the earth. That's our same phrase from revelation. The Kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.

Now that's the quote. Now they give the interpretation for truly against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, that's the Christ anointed one, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done. In other words, Lord, you, you spoke about this in Psalm chapter two, you said the Kings of the earth and the rulers would stand against you and against your Messiah.

And surely they say, that's what has happened. Pontius Pilate, Herod, the Gentiles, the rulers of Israel, they've all come against Christ. Just like Psalm two said, but you see what they're doing.

They're taking the expression, the Kings of the earth and naming them as Pilate, Herod, the Sanhedrin, the people who crucified Jesus, the rulers of Israel, the remember the word earth in Greek can mean land. So the Kings of the earth are taken to mean the rulers of the land of Israel. That's whose name Pilate was not a King.

Herod wasn't a King. The Sanhedrin weren't Kings, but they were the rulers of the land. And so the disciples understand this phrase, the Kings of the earth, as it's translated in our Bible to really belong.

The definition is the rulers of the land. Now what city rules over the rulers of the land? Jerusalem certainly was the capital of the land and all the rulers of the land answered to the capital city. And therefore there really remains nothing to prevent us from recognizing Babylon as the same great city that is spiritually called Sodom in Egypt.

It's also spiritually called Babylon. It is, as it says in revelation 11, eight, the city where our Lord was crucified and its fall is announced in revelation chapter 14, verse eight, it has fallen. Then verse nine, then a third angel followed them saying with a loud voice, if anyone worships the beast in his image and receives his Mark on his forehead or on his hand, remember the Mark on the forehead.

Well, the 144,000 had their father's name on their forehead. It's an, it's a symbol of being a slave, a slave with a brand, your owner's brand on your head or on your hand. This is where they put them, where they were easily spotted.

They couldn't cover hands and foreheads with clothing as easily as they could other parts of the body. So the brand was put on a slave on those parts. Now you either have the Mark of God, or you've got the Mark of the devil system.

And those who have the Mark of the devil system, who are the servants of the devil system is dev servants of God. That person himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of his indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the lamb and the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever.

And they have no rest day or night who worship the beast and his image. And whoever receives the Mark of his name here is the patience of the saints. Here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Now, I have to admit this, this passage almost all my whole life, I felt to be the very best passage in the Bible for the proof of the doctrine of eternal torment in hell, because it talks about the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever, and they have rest, no rest day or night. Sounds like eternal torment to me. But when I came to put it in context, I realized there are some problems with that identification.

For one thing, the torment and the torture is taking place in the presence of the lamb and the

holy angels. Now, one of the other famous verses in favor of eternal torment is 2 Thessalonians 1 and verse 9. In 2 Thessalonians 1, 9, it says, these shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. Now, although that's how it reads in the Greek, most modern translations add a word and they have it like this.

These shall be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. In other words, the argument from this verse is usually this, whatever hell may be, it's away from God. It's away from his presence.

It's in outer darkness. God is light and God is blessing and good. And to be totally removed from that forever is hell.

And that these will be experiencing everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord is the way that many people understand this. This, uh, most people understand this particular verse, second Thessalonians 1, 9. But if hell, in fact, is by definition away from the presence of the Lord, but this torment we're reading about is in the presence of the lamb and in the presence of the holy angels, this is not often some far dark corner of space. This is like in the arena where Jesus is present.

What is this talking about? Now, one of the things that of course, directs our ideas toward hell are this, the language of smoke growing up forever and ever, but we have to realize this is not the only place that speaks of smoke going up forever and ever. In fact, the first place that occurs is in Isaiah 34. And it's from there that the imagery of revelation is being borrowed.

Isaiah 34 says it's a prophecy about the destruction of Edom. That's what it says. Isaiah 34 five says for my sword shall be bathed in heaven.

Indeed, it shall come down on Edom. And on the people of my curse for judgment, Isaiah 34 five, Edom, it has been extinct now for 2000 years. There are no Edomites.

They've been gone. They were, they essentially became extinct in the time of Christ. Herod's family was the last known Edomite family on earth.

So this judgment of Edom must be in the past, certainly. But as it describes it in the apocalyptic imagery it uses, it says in verse nine, let's see Isaiah 34 nine, its stream shall be turned into pitch. Now pitch is like burning tar, its dust into brimstone, its land shall become burning pitch.

It shall not be quenched night or day. Its smoke shall ascend forever from generation to generation. It shall lie waste.

No one shall pass through it forever and ever. This isn't talking about hell. This is about Edom devastated by the judgment of God.

And the judgment of God is symbolically referred to as fire that burns in it forever and ever, which of course, that's also how Jeremiah and Isaiah spoke about what God's judgment on

Israel and God's judgment on Judah were his, the wrath, his fire that was not quenched. So we have here fire that's not quenched day or night. Its smoke ascends forever and ever.

Now smoke ascending and brimstone and fire. These are images, not literal, certainly Edom didn't perish in fire and brimstone and eternal smoke, but these are images borrowed from Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone.

And the next day, Abraham looked in the direction and it says the smoke of the city ascended like the smoke of a furnace and darkened the sky. So the, the pillar of smoke, the fire and the brimstone, these are images from the destruction of that pagan city, Sodom and Gomorrah. The imagery is then applied to Edom, which was destroyed 2000 years ago, but not in the same manner.

Certainly it was destroyed by Arabian tribes coming in and wiping them out. And then the Nabataeans taking over their land, the Edomites just simply disappeared. It wasn't fire and brimstone literally, but their judgment is likened to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah in principle, not in method.

Likewise, in revelation, we have the same imagery borrowed indeed from Edom's judgment in Isaiah 34, but even prior to that from Sodom and Gomorrah. And remember who's Sodom, who is spiritually called Sodom. The city where our Lord was crucified in revelation is spiritually called Sodom.

Therefore the apocalyptic imagery, which resembles that of the destruction of Edom also resembles that of Sodom. And if this is the judgment of Jerusalem, then this would be saying that the city would be destroyed and would be perpetually destroyed. Now it says the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever.

It doesn't say their torment, but the smoke of their torment ascends. Their torment no doubt happened when they were burned. People usually are tormented in fire, not in smoke.

If they're in a lot of smoke, they usually inhale it and die. Like in a burning house, they're more likely to die of smoke inhalation than of the fire itself. Their torment is in the fire.

The smoke is what ascends when the fire is essentially done. Like in Sodom and Gomorrah, it was the next day after Sodom and Gomorrah were burned up. That's when Abram went out and looked towards Sodom and saw the smoke of it rising like a great furnace.

There was no more fire, no more torment. But the smoke was the memorial of the torment that had happened the day before. The continuing smoke tells us there was a fire there.

Where there's smoke, there was fire. And there was, in this case, the fire of torment. The ascending smoke forever and ever is not necessarily to be taken as a reference to eternal torment in hell because this is not in hell.

This is in the presence of God. This is not in the absence of God. This is language that is taken from the historical destruction of the land that perished 2,000 years ago and borrowed directly from the passages that describe that and not used any more literally here than in that earlier passage.

It's used, in fact, the same way as it was used in Isaiah. Now, at least that's what I think. Now it says in verse 13, Now, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.

Well, what about previous to this? Didn't people who die in the Lord, weren't they blessed before now? Is this some like turning point in history where now people who die in the Lord will be blessed but not before? Many commentators have said, well, from now on means from the point of their death on. Not from this point in history on. It'll be more blessed to die in the Lord from this point on in history than it was before that point in history.

But rather, from now on means from the point that they've died. When they die in the Lord from that time on, they're blessed. And I think that would be a sensible thing, a sensible interpretation.

Now, by the way, this verse 13 has a voice from heaven. It does not say if it was an angel. If it was, we have seven angels in this chapter, but it doesn't say it was an angel.

There are many other voices in this chapter that are almost always a loud voice. This one's not said to be loud, but most of them are the voices of angels, but we have a loud voice in verse seven. We've got a loud voice in verse nine.

We've got a loud voice in verse 15. We've got a loud voice in verse 18, and we've got a voice from heaven here speaking. I'm not sure how that numbering works with the other things.

It doesn't say it was an angel, so we can't really make a total of seven angels from that one reference. We are missing one. Tab seven.

And I looked and behold a white cloud, and on the cloud sat one like the son of man, having on his head a golden crown and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple crying with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, thrust in your sickle and reap, for the time has come for you to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. So he who sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth or the land, because earth can be translated land, and the land was reaped.

I'm going to favor the word land for reasons I'll give you once I make my comments here. Verse 17. Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also having a sharp sickle.

And another angel came out from the altar who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle saying, thrust in your sickle and gather the clusters of the vines of the vine of the land, for her grapes are fully ripe. So the angel thrust his sickle into the

land and gathered the vine of the land and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city.

The city is not named. Presumably we've heard of it before. And blood came out from the winepress up to the horse's bridles for 1,600 furlongs.

Now I read this whole section because although there's two parts to it, we need to see them in juxtaposition with each other. There is first of all what appears to be the harvest of the grain in verses 14 through 16. And then there's the vintage, the bringing in of the grapes in verses 17 through 20.

And this corresponds with the two seasons in Israel where the produce was brought in. Early in the summer at Pentecost, they would harvest the grain. The first fruits of the grain were brought in at Pentecost of the wheat.

Later in the summer, in fact after the summer around September, the fruit had had a chance to ripen all summer and they would bring in the fruit later in the year. So we have both of these actions going on here. First the grain is brought in and then the grapes.

Now when the grapes are brought in here, it's clearly an act of judgment because the grapes are thrown into a winepress and trampled upon and their grape juice is called blood. Notice that in verse 20, the winepress was trampled outside the city and the blood came out, not grape juice, blood came out of the winepress up to the horse's bridles for 1,600 furlongs. Now by the way, every commentator usually mentions that 1,600 furlongs, which is approximately 184 miles, is the exact length of the land of Israel from the northern to the southern border.

So the whole land of Israel is here suggested from Dan to Beersheba. From the north to the south, the distance, 184 miles is 1,600 stadia or 1,600 furlongs, which is also stadia in the Greek. That's basically the length of the country of Israel.

So the whole nation is said to be covered with blood, deep in blood, to the horse's bridles in blood. Now by the way, enough people to die and provide that much blood would be probably more people than you could fit in the Middle East altogether. So this is no doubt impressionistic.

This is a bloody massacre. It's a bloodbath is what it is. And it is the result of bringing the grapes in and trampling them.

So the trampling of the grapes is a judgment scene. But the gathering of the grain, probably not. In fact, I believe that these two actions, which do correspond to the two harvest seasons in Israel, represent first the gathering in of the remnant to safety.

That was 144,000 who were rescued before the judgment on the land. And then came the judgment on the land so that the whole land was filled with blood. Now, let me try to justify that from scripture, if I could.

If you look at Matthew chapter three, in the preaching of John the Baptist, Matthew three and verse 12, John the Baptist says of Christ, his winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his threshing floor. Now, a threshing floor, we're not familiar with that unless we're farmers, probably, or have read about it. A threshing floor is where the grain was brought in when it was harvested.

It was crushed up not into flour, but it was broken up so that the wheat kernels were separated from the chaff. And the chaff was all intermixed in the pile of or something like a shovel, almost like a snow shovel. And they'd take big lots of this and throw it up in the air on the threshing floor.

The wind would blow the chaff away because it was like feathery, hairy, lightweight. The wheat was heavier, so it falls right down. And they'd keep doing this until the chaff had all blown away and you have nothing but wheat left.

This was threshing. Now, John the Baptist said that Jesus was coming, and he was immediately, and then he had a fan in his hand to thresh his floor. And there was an immediate threshing in Israel going to happen.

There's going to be a separation of wheat and chaff in Israel. In Israel at that time, there was a faithful remnant who became the disciples of Jesus, and there was an apostate majority who eventually succumbed to the Romans a generation or within that generation. Now, John said, his winnowing fan is in his hand.

He will thoroughly purge his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn or to a safe place, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Now, this is not something that's talking about hell someday.

This is talking about what was about to happen. John is warning the Jews of his time that Jesus was coming immediately and was going to make this division between the wheat and the chaff. The wheat would be saved.

They were the remnant that followed Jesus. The chaff, they're going to experience a fiery judgment. But notice also verse 10, John speaking also similarly says, even now the axe is at the root of the trees.

Therefore, every tree, which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So we've got the fruit and we've got the grain and God is the harvester and the winner. And he's, John said, it's happening now.

The axe is already poised at the root of the tree. This is not something in the distant future. This is now about to take place, John said, and the fruitless trees will be thrown into the fire.

The chaff will be burning the fire, but the grain, that's a different story. The grain is going to be into a greenery. It's going to be brought into a barn where it's kept safe and secure before the

judgment on the wicked takes place.

And this was of course, the remnant of Israel saved in Christ, escaping from Jerusalem and not being there. So you see the gathering of the wheat comes first in this image in revelation. The righteous are gathered out of Israel before the Romans come and trample them.

Now we have this vine of the land thrown into the wine press. Now there's no question what the vine is because throughout the old Testament, Israel is the vine and the vineyard. In fact, it says in Isaiah 5, 7, the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel.

And the men of Judah are his pleasant plant, meaning his vine in the vineyard. The vine of the land is the people of Israel. And that vine is thrown into the wine press and trampled and blood comes out, not grape juice.

Now this idea of trampling a wine press as a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem comes from Lamentations chapter one, just after the book of Jeremiah is the book of Lamentations. And it is written after Jerusalem is destroyed in 586 BC, it is a lamentation over the fall of Jerusalem, something very similar to what happened in 70 AD, only with different attackers. And in Lamentations 1, 15, Jeremiah laments this way, he says, the Lord has trampled underfoot all my mighty men in my midst.

That is Jerusalem speaking more or less. The mighty men of Jerusalem in the midst of Jerusalem were trampled down. He has called an assembly against me to crush my young men.

The Lord trampled as in a wine press, the virgin daughter of Judah. Notice the destruction of Jerusalem is likened in Lamentations to trampling in a wine press, the people. And of course, the book of Revelation borrows heavily from these Old Testament images.

The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was also like trampling in a wine press, exactly like what happened in 586 BC. So all the way through this chapter, we have got the destruction of Jerusalem in view. And then we have a really short chapter, 15.

It says, and by the way, it may be that this short chapter could be seen as the interlude between the sixth and the seventh angel. We have had six angels in chapter 14. And as I said, the seventh angel could be identified with the combination of all seven of the last angels who bring the last plagues.

And this interlude is in between as there is always an interlude between the sixth and the seventh item in a series, except as we shall see in this last series, this is the last judgments. Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues for in them, the wrath of God is complete. And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire.

Now that was seen in heaven previously before the throne. So this must be a scene in heaven. And those who have the victory over the beast, probably because they died, that was their

victory.

Remember they overcame by the blood of the lamb and the word of the testimony and did not love their lives. Even to the death, dying faithful is victory in revelation. They had victory over the beast, over his image and over the mark and over the number of his name standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

And they sing a song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the lamb saying, great and marvelous are your works, Lord God, almighty, just and true are your ways. Oh, King of the saints, who shall not fear you a Lord and glorify your name for you alone are holy for all nations shall come and worship before you for your judgments have been manifested. Judgment against Jerusalem was manifested.

And the result is all nations. Now here, the gospel, the gospel goes out beyond the Jewish mission to all the nations. And as a result of his judgments, we may manifest all nations as a result will come and worship before him.

After these things, I looked and behold the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was open. That's a long connection, a string of phrases. The temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened and out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues clothed in pure bright linen, having their chests girded with golden bands.

Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels, seven golden bowls full of wrath of God who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, just as it was when Solomon built the temple. And when, and when Moses built the tabernacle in Exodus 40 verses 34 and 35, it says, when Moses erected the tabernacle, the glory of God filled it like a cloud and the priest, Moses couldn't go in.

It says now when Solomon built the temple in first Kings chapter eight, verses 10 and 11, it says that smoke filled the temple there to the glory of the Lord in a cloud filled the temple. And it says the priests could not go into minister. Here we read the temple was filled with a smoke from the glory of God and from his power.

And no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed. God is about to be glorified in his new temple because the old one is defunct. Remember Jesus, when he left the temple, the last time he walked out, he said to the Jews, your house is left to you.

Desolate now earlier in his ministry, he said, my father's house, do not make my father's house, a house of merchandise or a den of thieves. But that was early on at the end of his ministry. It's not his father's house anymore.

His father's moved out. He said, your house is left to you. Desolate.

You will not see me anymore until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

The house in Jerusalem was abandoned by God. He moved into a new house made of living stones, the church of the living God, which is the house of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And so God's temple, as it were in heaven, the real temple is now got his glory. The old temple has been abandoned, but that no one was able to enter the temple might even suggest that there's no more any intercession being made. You go to the temple to pray that Jerusalem's going down and it's too late to pray.

Just like in Jeremiah's day, God repeatedly said, Jeremiah, don't pray for these people. Don't pray for these people. Why? Because they've gone too far.

They're doomed. Now you talk about Jerusalem being destroyed by the Babylonians as Jerusalem was about ready to be destroyed by the Romans. It may be that this is the message that is given in here.

People can't go in the temple until the judgment has come down because it's too late to pray for these people. Now, real quickly, chapter 16, you might say, what quickly? 16. Yes, because I won't make as many comments about 16, but it says, then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth or on the land.

So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the land or earth and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Now, if, if the beast is, let's say the Roman empire here, worshiping the beast, you think, well, the Jews didn't do that. They hated Rome.

They're not worshipers of the beast. How could this be Jerusalem that's plagued like this? If it's them who worship the beast. Do you remember that when Pilate said, shall I crucify your King? The Jews said, we have no King, but Caesar, they were given the choice.

Do you want Jesus or Caesar? We'll take Caesar. They put Caesar in the place of their Messiah. That's worshiping the beast.

That's taking the beast side against God. That is what they did. And what comes on them is a loathsome sore.

Now, no doubt in the siege of Jerusalem with all the infection and so forth that Josephus described, I'm sure people had sores all over them. We get sores on us from just a little bit of contamination from things. And we live in a very sterile world compared to the horrible conditions that were in Jerusalem during the five months siege that Josephus describes as horrendous.

They may have had sores all over their bodies, but more important than the literal is the symbolic because sores or boils was one of the plagues of Egypt and revelation sees a recurrence of the plagues of Egypt. You've got plagues of water turning to blood. You've got

plagues of boils.

You've got plague plagues of darkness. You've got plagues of frogs. You got plagues of locusts.

You've got in revelation, a recurrence of the plagues of Egypt. Now, not literally revelation is apocalyptic. The descriptions convey ideas more than pictures of what you'd really see if you were there necessarily.

In fact, we've been told that Jerusalem is spiritually called Egypt. Egypt was judged by plagues such as these, and therefore it's appropriate for the symbolic description of the judgment of the spiritual Egypt to have corresponding plagues. And so the first bowl of wrath corresponds with the sixth plague of Egypt, which was boils.

Verse three, then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea and it became blood as of a dead man and every living creature in the sea died. Now, when the second trumpet was sounded back in chapter eight, a third of the sea turned into blood and a third of the things in the sea died. A third of the ships were destroyed and so forth.

Now it's the whole thing. Remember the turning of water into blood is also an Egyptian plague. And so we see, remember I read to you when we were talking about the second trumpet, Josephus described a battle on the sea of Galilee where the Romans just butchered the Galileans out in boats.

And even he said when the Galileans tried to swim to the Romans for help, they cut off their heads or cut off their hands when they came to their boats. And he said that the next day, he said, if you looked at the sea of Galilee, he said it looked all blood. Josephus said it looked all bloody and you'd see the abundance of swollen dead bodies on the shore and shipwrecks.

He said the very kinds of things that revelation seems to be describing. In any case, these are impressionistic judgments, not necessarily literal, but in some measure they correspond to things that really did happen literally. But the more important thing is their likeness to the plagues of Egypt.

Verse four, then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and the springs of water and they became blood. Now when the third trumpet sounded, the rivers and springs water became wormwood and people died from drinking the bitter waters. This time it's blood.

And I heard the angel of the water saying, you are righteous, O Lord, the one who is and who was and who is to be, because you have judged these things for they, the ones who are being judged, they have shed the blood of saints and prophets and you have given them blood to drink for it is their just due. Now, this is a dead giveaway of who we're talking about here. They have shed the blood of saints and prophets.

Look at Luke chapter 13 real quick. Luke chapter 13, none less than Jesus makes this comment. Luke 13, 33 through 35.

Jesus said, nevertheless, I must journey today, tomorrow and the day following for it cannot be. It cannot be that a prophet should perish outside Jerusalem. Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her.

How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing. See, your house has left you desolate. And assuredly I say to you, you shall not see me until the time comes when you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Your house has been abandoned by God. You are the one who kills the prophets, Jerusalem. It can hardly be imagined that a prophet would perish anywhere else.

Jesus says it can't be that a prophet perish outside Jerusalem. Now look at Matthew 23. Again, Jesus is the speaker here.

Matthew 23, 35 and 36. Jesus said that on you, he's speaking to Jerusalem. In case you wonder, you can go up a few verses earlier.

And he says that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Barakai, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come on this generation. So who, who's paying the price for the blood of the martyrs, the prophets and all that.

Jesus said, all their blood is going to come on your head. And it's going to be in this generation, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70, 80, Jesus interpreted it as the just do for all the prophets that Jerusalem had killed. And that generation was going to pay the price.

What does revelation 15 say? These people are drinking blood. It's their just do because they've shed the blood of the saints and the prophets. This is not similarity.

This is identity. You can't have all the blood of the prophets being punished on the generation of Jews. Jesus is speaking to and also have it.

Someone else punished to some other time for it. This is the punishment for those who killed the prophets. We're reading about here.

This is the destruction of Jerusalem. Now, revelation 16, seven, I heard another from the altar saying, even so, Lord God, almighty, true and righteous are your judgments. Then verse eight, then the fourth angel poured up his bowl on the sun and the power was given to him to scorch men with fire.

And men were scorched with great heat and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues. And they did not repent and give him glory. Now, the sun scorching people, this is symbolic.

Although people who are future sometimes say, well, this is going to be like when the ozone

layer is depleted and, you know, where we get too much radiation and so forth and we'll die from that. Well, that may happen in the future, but that's not what this is talking about. I don't That's the wrong time frame.

The sun scorching is symbolic, just as the sun not scorching is symbolic in other passages where promises are made to Israel and to others. For example, earlier in chapter seven and verse 16, chapter seven, verse 16, it was talking about the multitude that came out of the great tribulation. It says they shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore.

The sun shall not strike them nor any heat for the lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. This is the consolation given to God's people.

Among other things, the sun shall not smite them. But that even comes from earlier passages like Isaiah chapter 49 and Isaiah chapter 49, a promise to Israel that is to the remnant of Israel. We have to understand there's a difference between Israel, the nation and the remnant.

He says to them in Isaiah 49, 10, they shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them. For he who has mercy on them will lead them even by springs of water. He will guide them.

So this is obviously the verse that revelation seven is alluding to. But in Psalm 121 and verse five and six, it says the Lord is your keeper. The Psalm 121 verses five and six, the Lord is your keeper.

The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil.

He shall preserve your soul. Now this this is a poetic way of talking about being protected from all evil. The sun won't strike you today and the moon won't strike you by night.

I never heard of anyone getting moon stroke, sun stroke, maybe. Moon stroke. Do people get moon stroke? Does the moon strike people at night? No, this is poetry.

The idea is that nothing in the universe will hurt you when God is protecting you. You see, the imagery of God protecting you from the sun and from scorching and moon even is this is the opposite. Now God is not protecting them.

Everything hurts. Everything is against them. The whole world, the whole universe is, as it were, against them.

They're scorched by the sun and they don't repent. It's, I believe, symbolic. Now, Revelation 16, 10.

Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast and his kingdom became full of darkness and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain and they blasphemed the

God of heaven because of the pains and their sores and did not repent of their deeds. Now, the throne of the beast, we're encountering here characters that we've been introduced to previously. The beast first appeared in chapter 11, coming out of the bottomless pit to make war with the two witnesses.

Then the beast came out of the sea when we had our first actual description of him in chapter 13. Later, we'll see the woman riding on the beast. Clearly, these chapters are not chronological, but the beast is a known entity already in Revelation.

Then later in verse 19, we see the city of Babylon. That's a known entity too. We know from chapter 17 that the beast hates the whore, Babylon, and destroys her with fire.

The beast, most would say in the time of John, was Rome. And Babylon, no doubt, and certainly not all would say this, but there's lots of opinions about Babylon. But I've told you, I believe Babylon is another name for Jerusalem, just as Sodom and Egypt are other names for Jerusalem in Revelation.

Something happens to Rome and something happens to Jerusalem around the same time. The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, that would presumably be Rome, and his kingdom became full of darkness and people were agonizing in it. What happened in Rome around the time that Jerusalem was being judged? Well, a number of things.

Jerusalem, of course, was at war from 66 to 70 AD. During part of that time, 64 to 68, the church in Rome was being persecuted. But in 68 AD, Nero, the persecutor, committed suicide.

And when Nero committed suicide, there was not a natural successor. So for 18 months, Rome was torn by civil war. Generals and pretenders made themselves Caesar for a few months at a time, and then they were killed by the next guy who wanted to be the Caesar.

And so you had after Nero, there was Galba, then Otho, then Vitellus. These three rose and fell within a single year and a half. One of them ruled for, I think, one month, if I'm not mistaken, another for three months.

This was a time of turmoil in Rome. Historians like Gibbon, who's the most famous historian of the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, suggest that it's almost a miracle that the Roman Empire survived it because of the tremendous turmoil. There was starvation.

There was civil war. There was killing in the streets. And this was going on in Rome, the capital city, for a year and a half up until 70 AD, actually, so that the Jewish war corresponded in time with what was going on in Rome when Nero was dead.

It was called the year of the five emperors because Nero was the first, then there were three, and then, of course, Vespasian became emperor. He had been besieging Jerusalem before he went back to Rome to become the emperor and stop all this. Then he sent his son Titus back to besiege and destroy Jerusalem.

So Jerusalem was coming under this at the same time Rome was coming under something. The throne of the beast was under judgment as well because of the persecution Nero had brought against the church. And so we have the fifth angel representing this judgment that came upon Rome at the same time that Jerusalem was under judgment.

Then the sixth, verse 12, then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up so that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. Now, I've mentioned before that the kings of the east are sometimes thought to be China by modern dispensational prophecy interpreters. And the drying up of the Euphrates, for example, Hal Lindsay and other interpreters like them have suggested that the river Euphrates will be dried up so that the Chinese armies can march on Israel for the battle of Armageddon.

We will read about the battle of Armageddon in verse 16. So we're in that time frame. So we've got what futurists say are the Chinese armies.

The armies mentioned under the sixth trumpet had 200 million men, and Hal thinks those are the same armies so that they believe that China will have 200 million men marching. Mao Zedong once said that they could field an army of 200 million men, and Hal Lindsay believed that was a confirmation of his theory. So he believed, Hal Lindsay said that up in Russia or somewhere, the Russians have built, not in Russia, but somewhere north on the river Euphrates, the Russians have built a dam.

And he believes that they'll dam up the river and dry up the river so the Chinese armies can march through it. And they think that's what's talked about here. The river Euphrates is dried up to make way for the kings of the east.

Now, I don't know if those who suggest this have given much thought to how unlikely that scenario is. First of all, armies do not need to dry up rivers to cross over them now. In the old days, they did.

In John's day, they did. In Old Testament, they did. But armies are not obstructed by rivers.

You don't have to dry up a river. We use airplanes, helicopters, amphibious troop carriers, amphibious tanks. Rivers are not a problem.

You don't have to dry up a river to make the way for an army, a modern army to invade an area. In fact, why would the Chinese even send 200 million men to the Middle East when they could just send a missile? It's very expensive sending the troops. And what, are they marching from China to the Middle East? That's expensive and slow.

Or are they going to fly in to someplace nearby and then march in across the Euphrates? What is it that is being pictured here? Someone really believes there's 200 million Chinese going to be marching through the desert from China to invade Israel? Why? The only reason the Chinese would send troops is if they want to If they just want to destroy, they can send missiles. They can stay home. This idea of the drying up of the river Euphrates to let Chinese armies march

through, to me, it's not realistic.

And there's a much more realistic understanding of this to me. We're reading about the fall of Babylon, right? Mystery Babylon. Babylon falls in verse 19.

The imagery is of the destruction of the spiritual Egypt and the spiritual Babylon, the two cities who in history enslaved Israel and who were judged by God so that Israel would be saved. And in the salvation of the new Israel, there is the destruction of the new Egypt and of the new Babylon. And the plagues of Revelation recall the destruction of Egypt and the drying of the river Euphrates and the king's knees recall the destruction of Babylon.

You remember how Babylon fell, don't you? Cyrus, the king of the East, Persian, brought his armies from the East and they dried up the river Euphrates and marched under the walls to Babylon and defeated it. This imagery is simply talking about God bringing armies, which in the event turned out to be Roman armies, and removing what are obstacles that allow them to break through the walls and get at Jerusalem, which is the new Babylon. The imagery is, of course, symbolic.

And people might get tired of me saying it's symbolic, it's symbolic, it's symbolic. But hey, Revelation is symbolic. Deal with it.

It's not literal. Not very often. Even Jesus is a lamb 27 times in the book, but he's not literally a lamb.

Satan is a dragon with seven heads and horns. He's not literally a reptile with seven heads, ten horns. That's symbolism.

Everything in Revelation is symbolism. And that doesn't mean there's nothing literal going on that the symbols refer to, but it means that we can't just, I mean, just because the river Euphrates dries up for the king's knees, we need to say, what is the idea this is trying to convey from Old Testament history and the fall of Babylon? And we're talking about Babylon falling here. So this is about the invasion against the new Babylon, which came, of course, from, by the way, the 10th Legion, I think it was, of Rome played a major role in the siege of Jerusalem.

And they were stationed at the river Euphrates until they were called in. The river Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. And so it was a border to be defended.

And there was a legion of Roman soldiers there, or I don't know if they're called, if it was a legion, some kind of unit of soldiers that were brought in from the river Euphrates to against Jerusalem. But that may or may not be significant because I don't know that we have to make the river Euphrates be literal. But if we want it to be, the Romans came from there, from the east.

Now he says in verse 13, I saw three unclean spirits like frogs, like a plague of frogs, only three this time. These are said to be demons coming out of the mouth of the dragon, who is Satan,

out of the mouth of the beast, out of the mouth of the false prophet. Remember I said that I don't believe these are references to individuals.

The beasts in Daniel were not individuals. They were kingdoms. The beast in Revelation is kingdom, not individual.

And these frogs are not really frogs, but it's like, recalls the plague of frogs from Egypt. And these are false. These are evil spirits.

For they are the spirits of demons, it says in verse 14, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and to the whole world to gather them to the battle of the great day of God almighty. Behold, I'm coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walked naked and they see his shame.

And they gathered them together to the called in Hebrew Armageddon, which means the mountain of Megiddo arm arm is mountain, mountain of Megiddo. Now, um, okay. These, the demons from the devil and the beast, the false prophet are drawing the nations.

This would be the Roman troops, which are made up of all the nations that Rome had conquered to this place, this battle. Where is it? It's in Israel. Of course, Armageddon is a reference to a location up in Northern Israel.

It's actually the, the Valley of Megiddo Armageddon is a strange word. That means mountain of Megiddo. And there really isn't a mountain called Megiddo Mount Carmel is there.

Mount Carmel is probably the closest mountain to the Valley of Megiddo. And it may be a reference to Carmel, but, uh, if it is, it may be a reference to Elijah's showdown with the prophets there, a bail. I don't know, but, but mountain of Megiddo is a strange phrase because there isn't such a mountain by that name, but there's a Valley of Megiddo.

And that is a place where lots of battles were fought in Israel's history. The most significant of which was when Josiah went out to resist Pharaoh, Nico Pharaoh, Nico was going up to Carthage to face Nebuchadnezzar, who is rising in 605 BC. And, uh, at Carthage, uh, of course, Pharaoh Nico was defeated, but Josiah tried to prevent Pharaoh Nico from going, went to intercept him and got himself killed.

Josiah died in the Valley of Megiddo. It was a place of mourning. It was a place of destruction.

It was a place of defeat for Israel. And it is no doubt why it is mentioned here as the place where this battle is going to be fought, as it were, is it literally going to be at the Valley of Megiddo? Not necessarily. The whole land of Israel was full of blood.

Remember the Romans came into Galilee first and made their way to Jerusalem for three and a half years. The whole land was at war. Certainly the Valley of Megiddo saw its share, but the point here is that it's like the loss that Israel's suffered at Megiddo before.

This is, this is destruction. This is defeat for Israel. And it's the great day of God almighty.

Now we've experienced, we've, we've seen in the old Testament references to the great day of the Lord. Uh, Joel called it the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Malachi called it the great and terrible day of the Lord.

Both of the contexts of Joel and Malachi place it in the first century. Joel places it right after Pentecost. Joel said that the spirit of the Lord would be poured out and then there'll be fire and blood and vapor of smoke in that, before that great and terrible day of the Lord.

Peter quoted that passage on the day of Pentecost and said it was being fulfilled at that time. The outpouring of the spirit and by implication, the soon blood fire and vapor of smoke in the terrible day of the Lord. Malachi said that Elijah would be sent before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

And Jesus said, if you can receive it, John the Baptist is Elijah who is to come. So Malachi is talking about John the Baptist coming before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Joel talks about the point of the Holy spirit on Pentecost before the great dreadful day of the Lord.

What's the great and dreadful day of the Lord? Well, John the Baptist came and warned them that he, that God was about to throw the chaff into the fire and the fruitless trees in the fire. This is the judgment that Jesus said would come on that generation. It's the battle of the great day of God almighty.

It's God's judgment upon those who crucified his son and remained unrepentant. Of course, not all the Jews remained unrepentant. There were the church in Jerusalem.

There were Christian Jews, but they escaped this. This was God's battle avenging the death of his son and of the prophets whose blood had been shed. Jesus said, all their blood is going to come on this generation.

This was the generation that happened to last bowl quickly. Then the seventh angel poured out the bowl into the air and a loud voice came out of the temple in heaven saying, uh, from the throne saying, it is done. This is the final downfall.

And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings. And there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts and the city of the nations fell in the Greek.

It says the city of the nations, not the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every Island fled away and every mountain, the mountains were not found.

And great hail from heaven fell upon men. Every hailstone about the weight of a talent, that's a hundred pounds. And men blaspheme God because of the plague and the hail, uh, since that

plague was exceeding great.

Now, when it's all done, a voice in heaven says it is done. And then there's what noises and thunderings and lightnings. These have been mentioned several times.

And each time they're mentioned, something more is added to them. A few chapters back, they added an earthquake. Then the next time there was an earthquake and hail this time, they don't add more things.

They just add intensity to both the earthquake and the hail. The earthquake is the worst ever. The hail, incredible hundred pound hailstones, the terrible judgment.

This is of course, apocalyptic imagery. When it says at the end of verse 18, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. I mean, there could be such an earthquake.

That's that way. But Jesus spoke that way about the destruction of Jerusalem. He said it'd be like nothing before nothing after.

In fact, Ezekiel spoke that way about the destruction of Israel in his day. In Ezekiel five, one, uh, yeah, Ezekiel five, I think it was verse nine. He said that what God was about to do in Jerusalem was like nothing he'd done before would ever do again.

It's hyperbole of course. But the idea is it's almost unique. It's extremely, uh, rare to have something this terrible happen.

And the city was divided into three parts. What's that mean? Well, Josephus tells us that during the siege of Jerusalem, the population inside that were besieged divided into three warring camps, the city divided into three parts that way. And some people think that's what is meant here, but I think not.

I think Ezekiel five gives the answer because in Ezekiel chapter five, it says in verse one, and you son of man, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber's razor and pass it over your head and your beard and take the balances and weigh and divide the hair, cut off all your hair and weigh it out into portions. You shall burn with fire one third in the midst of the city. When the days of the siege are finished, then you should take one third and strike around it with a sword and one third you shall scatter in the wind and I will draw out a sword after it.

Now in verse five, Ezekiel five, five, God explains what this is about. He said, this, thus says the Lord God, this is Jerusalem. I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries around about her.

She has rebelled against my judgment, et cetera, et cetera. He's saying basically she'll be divided into three fates. So a third of die by the sword, a third will be burned in fire and a third will be scattered to the wind that is just dispersed around the world.

He said, you divide your hair into thirds and that's what I'm gonna do to Jerusalem. The city's divided into thirds. This imagery comes from Ezekiel.

It's about Jerusalem and it says he gives her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. Now the earthquake is so bad that figuratively it says every island fled away and the mountains were not found. This was also said when the sixth, uh, and the sixth seal was broken in chapter six, verse 14, but all the mountains and islands moved around then to, or, or, or disappeared or something.

It's a course apocalyptic imagery. It's an earthquake. Everything's shaking.

You can find this in the old Testament, plenty. For example, even in Zechariah four, it says, who are you? Oh, mountain before is a rubble belt. You become a plane.

The mountain in front of the rubble is going to be removed or a mountain splits in two and makes a Valley in, in Zechariah chapter 14 or in some of the other prophets, the mountains melt or tremble or skip mountains, do those kinds of things in apocalyptic imagery. They don't do it in real life. And that's not what we're not supposed to be seeing this as a literal situation.

This is a disaster movie. This is basically trying to give us an impression of how great this disaster is, but there are literal things about it. Certainly the city did fall and great hail fell in verse 21.

It says great hail from heaven fell upon men, every hailstone about the weight of a talent and men blaspheme God because of the hail, et cetera. Now that's how this ends. What about these hailstones? Well, much of it, as I say, is symbolic and some of it is, has literal correspondency with reference to the talent weight hailstones.

There's an interesting passage that Josephus wrote. He was there. Josephus was a participant in that war.

He was there and he wrote the history of it afterwards. And when he was describing how the Romans were attacking Jerusalem with catapults, he referred to the catapult as engines. They're war engines.

This is a paragraph from Josephus. It's very interesting. He's talking about the Romans attacking Jerusalem.

He says the engines that the Roman legions had ready prepared for them were admirably contrived, but still more extraordinary ones belong to the 10th legion. That's the ones I mentioned who came from the river Euphrates. Those that threw darts, meaning arrows, and those that threw stones were more forcible and larger than the rest by which they not only repelled the excursions of the Jews, but drove away those that were upon the walls also.

So these stones and arrows are being thrust by catapults over the walls and driving away

people from defending the walls. Now, the stones that were cast were the weight of a talent. Isn't that interesting? Jerusalem pelted with stones the weight of a talent and were carried two furlongs and farther.

The blow that they gave was no way to be sustained, not only by those that stood first in the way, but by those that were beyond them by a great distance. As for the Jews, they at first watched for the coming of the stone, for it was of a white color. Josephus did not read the book of Revelation, but he describes Jerusalem being pelted with white stones about a talent weight.

It sounds more like a hailstone's a talent weight than almost anything else could be imagined. He says, they could therefore not only be perceived by the great noise it made, but could be seen also before it came by its brightness. Apparently in the night sky, they probably pelted the city at night, so the white color of the stone was easy to spot against the dark sky.

Accordingly, the watchman that sat upon the towers gave them notice when the engine was let go and the stone came from it, and they cried out aloud in their own country language, the sun cometh, S-O-N, by the way. We'll comment on that in a moment. So those that were in its way stood off and threw themselves down upon the ground, by which means, and by their thus guarding themselves, the stone fell down and did them no harm.

But the Romans contrived how to prevent that by blackening the stones, who then could aim at them with success when the stone was not discerned beforehand. Of course, it was nighttime, so the black stones could not be seen then. And it says, and so they destroyed many of them at a blow, it says.

And that's the end of that paragraph. That's in Wars of the Jews, Book 5, Chapter 6, Paragraph 3. But he says that there were these white stones about a talent weight falling on Jerusalem. In apocalyptic language, that could be talked about as a hailstorm of white stones, a talent weight.

But what's interesting is that Josephus says that when the watchman saw the stone coming, initially they were warning the people and they said, the sun cometh, S-O-N cometh. Scholars have puzzled over what in the world is that. Some scholars have speculated that it's a misprint or a miscopy, and that it originally said the stone cometh.

That would make sense. The stone's coming. That makes sense.

However, that works better in English than in Greek. So it's not likely that it was the stone cometh. And so there's been speculation.

Many have speculated that the Jews, having heard from the Christians that Jesus was going to come and judge the city, when these stones came, they were mocking, saying, oh, here comes the sun that they said is coming. The son of man's coming to destroy our city. The sun's coming.

You see, Stephen was stoned to death because they accused him of saying that Jesus of

Nazareth would come and destroy the temple. And he was stoned for that report. He was right, of course.

Jesus did destroy the temple through the Romans. But the Jews despised the Christians for this message and may very well have been mocking them when they said, oh, the sun is coming. But that's not the most important thing.

It's just an interesting side note. The interesting thing is that Josephus, who had no knowledge of what the book of Revelation said, because he was not a Christian and probably was not even living where the book of Revelation was in circulation. He was later in Rome, not in Asia Minor, that he talks about these stones, these white stones falling, and he mentions their weight.

And it corresponds exactly with what Revelation says. This was the fall of Jerusalem. And so chapters 14 through 16, I believe, give us the final plagues.

So what's left of those are the last plagues. There's still the fall of Babylon looked at as a separate subject in chapter 17 and 18 and 19. Then we've got the millennium in chapter 20.

That's going to be interesting. And then we have the new heaven, the new earth. And that's all that is left of Revelation for us.

And we'll be covering that in the remaining sessions.

OpenTheo

Revelation 17 - 18

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this presentation, Steve Gregg delves into the symbolism of Babylon in Revelation 17-18. He notes that while some interpret the harlot in these chapters as the Roman Catholic Church or a coalition of apostate faiths, it is equally likely that the term refers to Jerusalem as a great city and a harlot who cheated on Yahweh. Gregg draws connections to Jeremiah 2:20 and Ezekiel 16:23 to support this interpretation. He also explores the difficult passage in verses 7-11 and cautions against relying too heavily on futurist interpretations that have yet to come to fruition.

Transcript

Tonight we're at the beginning of Revelation chapter 17. This section of Revelation is a new section. The book divides into various segments.

Many of them are three chapters long. Not all of them. This one is.

Chapters 17, 18, and 19 are really one segment. And we are introduced in chapter 17 as if we've never heard of her before. We're introduced to the harlot.

Now, I don't know that we have heard of the harlot before this point, but we've certainly heard of Babylon. And the harlot is Babylon. So we see Babylon depicted to us under a new image here.

We encountered Babylon in chapter 14 the very first time with a simple announcement in chapter 14 verse 8 when another angel followed saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen. That great city. Because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Now we're going to find exactly the same announcements made in chapter 17 and 18. But the thing is in chapter 17 and 18 we get a proper introduction. We actually have a depiction of this city Babylon.

And some explanation. The explanation is not altogether lucid. But it's perhaps better than having none at all.

And so we do not have in verse 8 of chapter 14 any real information except that Babylon is

fallen at that point. And since we see Babylon unfallen in chapter 17, this again underscores the fact that the chapters of Revelation are not necessarily depicting things in their chronological sequence. That Babylon would be declared to be fallen already in chapter 14 and yet unfallen in chapter 17 would underscore that fact.

Also in chapter 16 which we just completed in our last session, at the very end when the seventh bowl of wrath was poured out, we're told in verse 19, now the great city was divided into three parts and the cities of the nations and I believe that the Greek manuscript says the city of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. Now one thing that's interesting about that is that when we first read of Babylon in chapter 14, there was a wine cup that she had made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

And now she is going to drink of that cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath for her fornication. We will read of both the wine of his wrath and the wine of her fornication in the chapters ahead of us tonight. But while Babylon has been mentioned in passing twice previously, Babylon is significant enough in Revelation to deserve a whole section to herself and chapters 17 and 18 are devoted to her.

Chapter 19 celebrates her fall and then goes on from there. But who is Babylon? Now in Revelation, we will find as you take the big picture and we have not really seen the portion of Revelation where this comes out clearly yet. But as you look at the whole remainder of the book of Revelation, you'll find that there's a focus on two cities, both of which are depicted as women.

One is the spiritual Babylon, which is the subject of chapters 17, 18, 19 and the other is spiritual Jerusalem, which is the subject of chapters 21 and 22. And so we have a spiritual Babylon and a spiritual Jerusalem. Now the Babylon city is compared to a woman who is a harlot.

The Jerusalem city is dressed as a bride, adorned for her husband when she is seen coming out of heaven in chapter 21. So we have this contrast between two cities, which are also likened to two women. One city is Babylon, the other is Jerusalem.

However, those are not the real names of either of them. In other words, Babylon is not the historical earthly Babylon and Jerusalem is not the historical earthly Jerusalem. They are symbolic names.

And the contrast between a faithful bride and a harlot suggests that one has been unfaithful and one has been faithful to her bridegroom. Now, the identification of Babylon has always been tricky. Let's read what it actually says in chapter 17 where essentially almost all the information we need is there.

Well, maybe not all the information we need, but mostly all the information we're going to get. And in chapter 17, we read this. Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, that's

from the series in chapter 16 of the bowls of wrath.

One of those angels appears in this segment as well, came and talked with me saying to me, come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.

And on her forehead, a name was written, Mystery Babylon, the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth. And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

But the angel said to me, why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw was and is not and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. I'm glad to have that cleared up.

And those who dwell on the earth will marvel whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. When they see the beast that was and is not and yet is. Here is the mind which has wisdom.

The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen.

One is and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. And the beast that was and is not is himself also the eighth and is of the seven.

And is going to perdition. The plot thickens. And the ten horns, which you saw, are ten kings who have received no kingdom as of yet.

But they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the lamb and the lamb will overcome them.

For he is lord of lords and king of kings. Those who are with him are called chosen and faithful. And he said to me, the waters which you saw where the harlot sits are peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues.

And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill his purpose. To be of one mind and to give their kingdom to the beast until the words of God are

fulfilled.

And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth. Now, chapter 18 is a one long lament over the fall of Babylon. So we don't actually see her go down, but we are told in verse 16 that she will be hated and desolated and burned up and eaten by the ten horns on the beast.

And so I guess, although it says they will do that to her, I guess we're to assume that we've seen that happen now. And then in chapter 18, there is this lamentation, which is taken from passages in the Old Testament. The passages in the Old Testament are in their original setting about Babylon, about Tyre, about Edom and about Sodom.

Kind of mixed up together as a collage of phraseology and verses from these Old Testament passages, all now applied to this one city that has fallen. Now, what should we do with this information? The futurist view, of course, looks for a future identity of the harlot. And of course, the beast in the futurist view, in the dispensational view, is a future antichrist.

And the woman is riding on the beast. So her career must be somehow parallel to that of the antichrist. According to dispensationalism, chapter 13 of Revelation tells us that this beast blasphemes God for 42 months.

And that must be approximately the length of time that this harlot is in the picture. At the end of it, the beast, or at least the 10 kings that are subject to him, turn on her and destroy her. It's obvious that if this has not already happened, the identifying of this woman is almost impossible.

But many have thought that she represents the apostate church. Because she's a harlot. And the church is supposed to be faithful to Christ, like the bride in Revelation.

In contrast to the bride, who is a faithful church, this is the unfaithful church. Some have identified the harlot with the Roman Catholic Church. Those who hold the historicist view have always identified the beast and the harlot with the Roman Catholic papacy.

The beast being more or less the political functioning of the papacy, and the harlot the religious functioning of the papacy. That's the historicist view. The futurist sometimes likes this idea too, depending on how anti-Catholic they are.

They sometimes would like to say that the harlot is the Roman Catholic Church. Or maybe the Catholic Church joined with apostate Protestantism in some liberal coalition. Like perhaps the World Council of Churches, something like that.

In any case, like the Church of Laodicea, gone bad, the church gone bad. Others think that the harlot simply represents the world system. Though it's hard to know exactly how to fit that theory into this, because she's said to be the city.

Of course, she could be a figurative city. After all, the New Jerusalem is identified with the church, the bride of the lamb. And the church is not a literal city, but a figurative city, so to speak.

And so, some think that it's the church, the true city of God, against this apostate city, the world system. But why this would be distinguished then from the beast is not entirely clear. In any case, the various ideas that have been suggested by futurists are all entirely speculative, since they know that they can't be tested.

Whatever they may suggest, who knows? It could happen that way. That's the nice thing about the futurist view. You don't really have any danger of having your views tested by fact.

Because if it hasn't happened the way you say it's going to, there's always the future. Who can say what will not happen in the future? And so, the futurist view has the great advantage of being untestable against any actual objective realities. The historicist view, which sees this as the papacy, does have at least some connection with historical events.

The idealist view tends to take the harlot as sort of the world system in general, the spirit of the world. But the preterist view, which holds that the book of Revelation is primarily about the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and the view that I've been essentially taking as we go through this, has had two different opposite views as to who the harlot is. One of the very popular views among preterists is that it is Rome.

And good arguments can be made for it being Rome. For example, the last verse of chapter 17 says, This is the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth. Certainly in John's day, and he does speak in the present tense, the city that could be said to rule over the kings of the earth was the city of Rome, the capital of the empire.

And so, many people think that that's the dead giveaway, this is a reference to Rome. Another thing about the city that seems to point to Rome is that in the lament in chapter 18, it is frequently mentioned how much the merchants are deprived. If the fall of Rome would mean that all the business they did at the empire's capital is over.

They've made themselves wealthy. Babylon is described as having a great deal of merchandise of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet and every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon and incense. Obviously, an international trade seems to be centered here.

And that was just reading from chapter 18, verse 12 and 13. But Rome in John's day might seem to be the best candidate there. Although, frankly, Tyre would be even more so, more of a trade city than Rome.

But since Tyre is not one of the contestants here, Rome would seem to be a contender. Also, in chapter 18 and verse 20, it says, Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and

prophets, for God has avenged you on her. And it is said that Rome is the city that killed the apostles.

And God, by causing this city to fall, is avenging the blood of the apostles. Paul and Peter both traditionally died in Rome. And perhaps other apostles, we don't know all of them, where they died.

But at least we know of two apostles that were killed in Rome. And therefore, their blood would be avenged by the fall of Rome. Beyond this, we have a statement that Peter makes at the end of 1 Peter, where he is closing down his epistle in 1 Peter chapter 5, and he sends greetings to the churches to whom he has addressed the epistle.

And he says to them in verse 13, 1 Peter 5.13, She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you, and so does Mark my son. Now, Peter is sending greetings from the church that he is with, where he is, sending it out to the churches in the regions to which this letter went. And he sends greetings from the church he's at, and it says, She who is in Babylon.

That's a personification of the church in Babylon. Now, tradition has it that Peter spent his final years in Rome and died there. And if he speaks of the place where he's sending this letter from as Babylon, and he was in Rome, that would seem to say that the early Christians may have used Babylon as a code name for Rome.

Although there are other theories, some think he was actually writing from the city of Babylon, which in the first century had a small population. We don't ever read or have any traditions about Peter going up to that area to minister, but that doesn't mean he didn't. So we have Peter's reference to Babylon in a context that sounds like he's talking about Rome.

And then one other thing, and that is when we are being told who the beast, or who the woman is and the beast in chapter 17 here, Revelation 17, 9. It says, Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. Now, the woman is the great city and she's sitting on seven mountains.

The ancient poets often spoke of Rome as the city that sat on seven hills. The city on seven hills. And here we're told this woman is a city that sits on seven mountains.

These indicators are thought by many scholars to point unmistakably to Rome. And obviously there's a good case for this. In fact, if there was not a better case for another contender, I would say there's a very solid case for Rome.

And it's a very respectable theory based on the evidence. But it's not the only contender and it's not the one that has, in my opinion, the strongest evidence. Now that would be up to you to decide.

In any case, even if Revelation is a book about the fall of Jerusalem, there could well be a discussion about the fall of Rome. Because Rome, too, was a player in the destruction of

Jerusalem. It was the main player.

And it was also a player in the conflict between the forces of darkness and the church. Because after Jerusalem fell, it was the Roman emperors, more than anybody else, that persecuted the church and made martyrs of them. So there is, of course, the possibility that even a preterist interpretation of Revelation would be concerned to talk about Rome.

And there are some preterist interpreters like J. Adams and like Luis de Alcazar, who is sometimes said to be the founder of the preterist system. He is not, because the system is known to have existed a thousand years before his time. But those who are actually trying to dismiss the preterist system say he is the founder.

He was a Jesuit. And the very fact that he was a Roman Catholic is thought to discredit his system because he was a preterist and a Jesuit. But as I say, a thousand years before Alcazar, there were preterists.

And that was before there was a Roman Catholic system to generate it. But Alcazar and more modern Protestant preterists like J. Adams believe that the first half of Revelation is about the fall of Jerusalem and the second half is about the fall of Rome. Jerusalem and Rome were the first persecutors of the Church.

Jerusalem first, through the Sanhedrin, and then the Roman Emperors. And so it is thought by these authors fitting that Revelation should depict the judgment on both of these enemies of the Church. After all, Christians were killed by the Sanhedrin.

Our first martyr, Stephen, was by their own hands. They stoned him to death. And yet the Apostles Paul and Peter were killed by Roman Emperors or by Nero, one Emperor.

And therefore, to see the blood of the martyrs vindicated against Jerusalem and Rome would be a fitting subject matter. And it's frankly a scenario, a paradigm for Revelation that I don't find objectionable at all, except I think there's probably a better explanation. But the idea that this is Rome is one of the preterist viewpoints.

The other is, not surprisingly, that it is Jerusalem. And in my opinion, Jerusalem is a better candidate. This is, of course, left to anyone to decide for himself.

But I'll tell you why. Because in the symmetry of the book of Revelation there is a deliberate juxtaposition between two cities and two women. One woman who is faithful to her husband, one is unfaithful to her husband.

And there are two cities that have been in covenant relationship with God. One faithful and one unfaithful. The bride is the faithful one.

She is the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22. Jerusalem, which now is, that is the earthly Jerusalem, is the unfaithful one. And that has been brought up throughout the book of

Revelation.

It is the city that is coming under judgment. One of the most important things that point to Jerusalem is that the woman is considered to be a harlot, which is not just like calling her a prostitute, which it is, but rather this is calling her by the specific name that God called Jerusalem by in the Old Testament when she was unfaithful to God, when she worshipped other gods. And she did that a lot.

And in Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 21, Isaiah is talking about Jerusalem and says how the faithful city has become a harlot. Jerusalem, once a faithful city in the days of David, now, Isaiah says, has become a harlot. A wife who was faithful to her husband has become unfaithful to her husband.

The word harlot here speaks specifically not just of an ordinary prostitute, but of a woman who has cheated on her husband, is no longer a faithful wife. And it is Jerusalem that Isaiah refers to this way. Over in Jeremiah chapter 2 and verse 20, speaking about Jerusalem, it says, For of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds, and you said, I will not transgress.

When on every high hill and under every green tree you lay down, play in the harlot. Again, he's talking about Jerusalem. Jerusalem was in covenant relationship with God, a wife to God.

But although they pledged loyalty to God, it really turned out that they went out and slept with every God passing by. And he says, you played the harlot. This is, of course, the whole message of Hosea, that Hosea described Israel as a harlot, and he married a woman who was a harlot.

We don't know that she was a harlot before he married her. Sometimes preachers say he went out and found a prostitute and married her. Actually, it just says he took a wife of harlotry, which might mean a woman who had already been a harlot, or a woman who was going to become a harlot, a wife who had just cheated on him.

And he did marry Gomer, and she cheated on him. And then he took her back, and this was his message, that God would be willing to accept repentant Israel, though they had been a harlot wife. In other words, in the Old Testament, Israel, and Jerusalem in particular, is called the harlot, or a harlot, and is likened to an unfaithful wife.

We will see a little later how that some passages in Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 23, a whole chapter in each case, two chapters in Ezekiel, are devoted to underscoring the harlotry of Jerusalem against God. So, when the readers of Revelation see that there is a harlot here, the first identification would be to Jerusalem, and especially if that has been the subject matter of the book in general, and especially if the two cities that are contrasted with each other are the faithful and the unfaithful wife of God. Jerusalem is the unfaithful one, and of course the church is the other.

Now, what's more, since there are only these two cities in juxtaposition, to introduce another city would imbalance the whole picture. Not that it couldn't be done, but it's not like Revelation

necessarily to throw in something that is not as symmetrical as that would throw things off. There's two cities focused on, Jerusalem and the church, and that is how it is, two women, two wives, and to throw Rome in there, see Rome never really was married to God, so the fact that Rome worshipped other gods was not a matter of unfaithfulness to Yahweh, they never knew Yahweh, they never had a relationship with Yahweh, they never had a promise they made to Yahweh.

The harlot is the one who cheated on Yahweh, and Rome, bad as they were, pagan as they were, were not violating any covenant relationship that they had with God, they were not an unfaithful wife, because they had never been a wife to God. Now, also, the first time we heard the term that great city, or the great city, which we now hear again and again and again with reference to Babylon, was back in chapter 11. And in chapter 11, verse 8, which we have seen a number of times, because it's such a key verse for understanding what Revelation is talking about, Revelation 11, verse 8 says, And their dead bodies, that is the two witnesses, will lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

Well, the fact that the Lord was crucified there identifies the city unmistakably as Jerusalem, it is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, and it is called the great city. Likewise, Babylon is repeatedly called the great city. In chapter 14, verse 8, where we first encountered Babylon, in 14.8, it says, The announcement of the angels, Babylon is fallen, that great city, a term that had been previously used of Jerusalem.

In chapter 16, likewise, chapter 16, verse 19, Now the great city was divided into three parts. Great Babylon was remembered before God. When we get to the lament against Babylon, the reference to her as a great city is extremely frequently repeated.

In chapter 18, for example, verse 10, Alas, alas, that great city, Babylon. And verse 16, saying, Alas, alas, that great city. Verse 18, what is like this great city? Verse 19, Alas, alas, that great city.

And verse 21, thus with violence, the great city, Babylon. So, the expression, the great city, is always applied to Babylon, except the first time the term is used, where it's identified as a city that is symbolically called Sodom and Egypt, and perhaps Babylon too. After all, calling Jerusalem Babylon is no more out of line than calling it Sodom, or Egypt.

In fact, of course, we have said that the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt in the days of Moses, and the deliverance of God's people from Babylon in the days of Cyrus, both provide Old Testament paradigms for New Testament salvation. That the Exodus is a paradigm of Christ's deliverance of his people, which is why Moses and Elijah, when they appeared to Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration in Luke chapter 9, spoke to him, as it says in the Greek, of the Exodus that Jesus was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. Here's Moses, who led the children of Israel in the original Exodus, talking to Jesus about a second Exodus.

Likewise, the exiles returning from Babylon is treated as another kind of an Exodus, and another type and shadow of Christian salvation. So, Egypt and Babylon are the two historical oppressors of the Church, and the destruction of whoever it is being judged in the book of Revelation has repeatedly been likened to the judgment of Egypt because of the plagues. They're like the Egyptian plagues.

The plagues in Revelation are mimicry of the Egyptian plagues, and the judgment on the city has also been likened to the judgment on Babylon. For example, the drying up of the river Euphrates to make way for the kings of the east. That's how Babylon fell historically.

And now here, Babylon is the main paradigm. But we are told that the Egypt character in the book is the city where our Lord was crucified. Babylon is another Egypt.

And Jerusalem is, in the book, treated as Egypt and as Babylon, whereas the people of God who escape and are saved through Christ are like the Jews escaping from Egypt or from Babylon, either one. And that great city, then, is a term that is used for Jerusalem and for Babylon. Now, there's also this fact, and it sort of militates against Rome being Babylon, and that is that the city is often said to fall very suddenly.

For example, in chapter 18, verse 8, it says, Therefore her plagues will come in one day. In verse 10, it says, For in one hour your judgment has come. And likewise, verse 17, For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.

And in verse 19, For in one hour she is made desolate. In one hour, three times it says in one hour, and one time it says in one day, this is said to be a sudden fall. Jerusalem did fall suddenly.

Rome never has had a sudden fall. Rome kind of fell, of course. It succumbed to barbarian invasions, usually several waves of them over a period of decades.

Rome kind of crumbled gradually over a period of decades from successive invasions from Vandals and Huns and Ostrogoths and so forth, and finally it fell in 476, but not suddenly. It wasn't like a one day affair that surprised everybody. Jerusalem came down rather suddenly.

The siege itself was only five months, but the breaching of the walls marked an exact day that Jerusalem was conquered and fell. And therefore, it seems with the suddenness that is emphasized here, Jerusalem makes somewhat more sense. But perhaps the most important identifier is the frequent reference to blood guilt.

Because in chapter 17, verse 6, it says, I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs. And then in chapter 18, verse 20, it says, rejoice over her, O heaven, and you, holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her. Not true.

A couple of the apostles, at least, were killed by Rome. But Jerusalem also was a killer of the saints and prophets and apostles. They didn't, with their own hands, kill James, but they

encouraged Herod in that way, and he killed James.

They also encouraged Herod to kill Peter, though Peter escaped. Herod, under the Sanhedrin's encouragement, arrested Peter, intending to kill him, but an angel sprang him out of jail and he got away. Also, of course, they killed Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our profession.

But mostly it's important to note that this city has killed the prophets as well as apostles. And in chapter 18, verse 24, it says, And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints and of all who were slain on the land. Or the earth, the word can be translated either way.

And then in verse 2 of chapter 19, For true and just are your ways, are your judgments, because he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants shed by her. So she is again and again and again said to be judged because of what she did to the martyrs. Now we've looked at these verses before, but we can hardly not look at them now in view of this frequent reference to this blood guiltness.

In Matthew chapter 23, Matthew 23, we've seen this recently, so I hope you don't get tired of seeing it, but this is directly relevant to identifying the harlot. Matthew 23, 29 says, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous. And you say, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

In other words, our fathers killed the prophets. We're kind of making up for it by decorating their tombs, making their tombs look pretty. We wouldn't have killed the prophets like our fathers did.

He says, therefore, your witness is against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. You call them your fathers? Well, you are their sons. Fill up, then, the measure of your father's guilt.

Serpents, blood of vipers, brood of vipers, excuse me. How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Or Gehenna. Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes.

Some of them you will kill and crucify. Some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city. This is Jerusalem, and these are the people that Jesus sends them, that include apostles.

And on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come on this generation. He's saying, you, Jerusalem, have killed the prophets, and you're going to kill the ones I send you, including the apostles I send you.

And all that blood guilt from all time, from Abel on, is going to come on this generation. And it

did. So the destruction of Jerusalem is emphatically said by Jesus to be the punishment for the blood of all the saints and prophets.

And that is what is again and again said of this woman. Now there are, what do we do with these matters where it looked like it was Rome? Especially chapter 17, verse 18, where it says, the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth. Well, I've mentioned before the expression kings of the earth can be translated, the rulers of the land, meaning the land of Israel.

And this very expression is used to mean that. Kings of the earth, the same expression in Greek, is found in Acts chapter 4, verses 26 and 27. We've looked at it before.

We won't turn there again now for lack of time. There the apostles actually quoted Psalm 2, which used this expression, the kings of the earth. And the apostle said, this is referring to Pontius Pilate, Herod, the Jews and the Gentiles who crucified Christ.

That'd be the Sanhedrin and the Roman authorities. These were what? The rulers of the land of Israel. The kings of the earth, therefore, is a term that the apostles identify with the rulers of Israel, the rulers of the land.

And the city that rules over the rulers of the land is certainly Jerusalem, the capital city. But what about the reference to the merchandise and all the merchants weeping over the loss of this city? Well, it's true. There are some cities that this description would fit more admirably, but it's not saying that this city was the only or the most luxurious city or the wealthiest or the busiest trading center.

It's just saying that people from all over the world had gotten rich trading with her. And that is true. Jerusalem and almost all the major big cities probably had made a lot of money through merchandise.

And Jerusalem had, we know that. Josephus describes all the wares that were available for sale in the city. And so there's no reason to think that merchants would not find themselves deprived of trading opportunities with this city out of the way.

What about Peter calling Rome Babylon? Well, we don't know for sure that he did. We know he spoke of Babylon and it may be he was talking about Rome. And if he was, that's fine.

Peter didn't write Revelation. Peter might well have thought Rome was very much of a new Babylon, but it doesn't mean that he was commenting on the book of Revelation or telling us how, whether or not another city might be likewise a new Babylon. In the case of Revelation, we need to actually identify Babylon from internal evidence of how the flow of the book is going and what is being said about Jerusalem and so forth.

Previously that might influence us to see whether this is Babylon. Now what about the seven mountains? In verse nine of chapter 17, here's the seven heads are seven mountains on which

the woman sits. Well, it's true that Rome is said to be the city that sits on seven hills.

And this may be a reference to those seven hills, but it's not the woman that has the seven heads. It's the beast. The beast can fairly readily be identified with Rome.

The woman is different than the beast. The woman sits on the beast. She is supported by the beast.

Jerusalem was supported and protected by being a province or the area was a province under Rome's protection and control. And the city was more loyal to Rome than to Christ. As I pointed out in an earlier lecture when Pilate said, shall I crucify your king? They said, we have no king but Caesar.

You know, in other words, Jesus isn't our king. Caesar is. That sounds like throwing their loyalty over to the side of the beast to Rome rather than the Messiah.

And she may sit on the beast that has the seven heads and the seven heads may indeed be the seven hills upon which Rome sits. She sits on Rome and it sits on seven hills. Anyway, these are some of the thoughts that might guide our inquiry.

I personally favor the Jerusalem identification. Many would favor the Rome identification. I think on balance, the Jerusalem identification is somewhat stronger.

Let's read it. Let's look at it. We've already talked about much of what's in it.

The woman is a harlot. She's sitting on the beast. The beast is, of course, the same beast we've seen previously in chapter 13.

He's got seven heads and 10 horns, kind of a dead giveaway. In this case, he is said to be a scarlet beast. The color of the beast was not mentioned previously in chapter 13, but it's clearly the same beast.

The one in chapter 13 was not. It's said to be a different color than scarlet. And in verse 5, it says, on her forehead a name was written.

Now, earlier, in chapter 14, verse 1, it says, So, they, we identified as the faithful remnant in Jerusalem who escaped before the Romans destroyed the city, which we know happened. The church in Jerusalem escaped. They were the ones with the father's name on their forehead.

The rest of the city that did not escape had another name written on their forehead. And it would appear that that name was not the name of God, but the name of Babylon, its new identity after rejecting the Messiah. And we see in verse 6, she was drunk with the blood of the martyrs.

Now, the angel claims to tell what the mystery is, but it's not at all clear. But there are some things that become more clear because, I mean, some things are going to remain unclear.

Frankly, this passage, verses 7 through 11, is truly one of the most difficult passages to decipher, partly because symbols do double duty.

For example, the seven heads are seven mountains, and they are seven kings. So, I hear one set of symbols represents two seemingly entirely different things at the same time. So, this tells us this is going to be a rather complex thing if a single symbol can mean two different things simultaneously, seven mountains and seven kings.

Of course, mountains can represent kingdoms because in the Old Testament, that is sometimes the case. A mountain is a symbol for a kingdom. And maybe that's how we're going to understand the seven kings, not so much kings as kingdoms.

One of the popular ways that preterists understand the seven kings is to see them as the seven emperors. He says, five have fallen, one now is. That's the sixth is now, and the seventh is not yet come.

And so, there were, in fact, five emperors prior to Nero. There was Julius Caesar, there was Caesar Augustus, there was Caligula, there was Claudius, and I'm leaving, Tiberius was after, after Augustus was Tiberius, and then Caligula, then Claudius, and then there was Nero. So, Nero was the sixth of the emperors, and if five had fallen and one now is, that would mean that Nero was the one that now, at the time of writing, was the emperor.

This is a good possibility. I believe it is, in fact, true. However, another way of seeing those kings would be to see them as kingdoms, as Daniel sometimes refers to different empires as kings.

And it could be that the five that have fallen were the five kingdoms that had risen and fallen before Rome did. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media Persia, and Greece. These five empires had risen and ruled the general area independently of each other at different times, serially, and now Rome was the sixth, and John might be saying the sixth king now is.

That's the Roman Empire. In which case, he's not telling us anything about which emperor is reigning, but in any case, we are told about the ones after the present emperor. This is what is confusing here.

It's one of the things that's confusing. There's more than one. It says about the seventh, it says, well, verse 10, five have fallen, one now is, and the other, that's the seventh one, has not yet come.

And when he comes, he must continue a short time. And then it says, and the beast that was and is not is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven and is going to perdition. Now this is particularly difficult, because it sounds like it's saying the beast himself who has the seven heads is really an eighth head.

But he's of the seven heads. What in the world that language means is truly an unsolved mystery. But some think that Nero is the sixth king, and the seventh one would be Galba.

After Nero committed suicide, the next emperor was Galba, but he only reigned for six or seven months. And therefore it says the one that has not yet come will continue a short time. And the eighth, well, who is he? Well, some think that, you know, since the number seven suggests completeness, the eighth is simply a reference to all the rest kind of wrapped up together, all the remaining emperors that are not consequential to this particular vision, because this vision is going to be fulfilled in the reign of Galba, the seventh.

The rest of the kings that would, the emperors that came afterwards, they're not worthy of enumerating. We'll just call them the eighth combined. They make the eighth, but they're like the seven.

They're of the seven. They're of the same spirit, same office, same type. And so that's one way of looking at it.

Another way, if we see it as seven kingdoms, would suggest that the seventh kingdom would be that which comes against the Messiah when the devil is let out of his prison for a little while. And it will continue a little while, but will be destroyed by the second coming of Christ. But that is not, to my mind, as good a suggestion.

And I'm not sure any suggestion I've heard or can make is excellent. It's very difficult. The 10 horns are 10 kings that give their authority to the beast.

The number 10 may be symbolic or it may be literal. Some have tried to identify 10 actual European ethnicities that were in the Roman Empire into which it dissolved eventually. It may also be that 10 is simply a symbolic number, meaning a total number of all the kings that are part of the Roman Empire, part of the beast.

And about those horns, those other ethnic nations, it says they give their power to the beast. And it says in verse 17, that God has put it in their hearts to fulfill his purpose. Now, the idea of God putting it in the hearts of people to do bad things is a bit problematic.

But we have to remember that the Bible teaches that God puts it in the hearts of bad people to do certain bad things that are quite consistent with their character. God never takes a good person and makes them do a bad thing. Nor does he take a neutral person and make him do a bad thing.

But he'll take a pharaoh who's a tyrant and an evil persecutor, and he'll harden his heart so that he'll do bad things more than he would before. It is not unfair for God to take somebody who has determined his own course to be a course of rebellion and sin and evil and say, okay, since that's the course you're in, it's these specific evil things I will have you do because that will fulfill my purpose. Joseph's brothers were evil.

God seemingly directed them in the direction of selling Joseph into Egypt. And he said, you intended evil against me, but God meant it for good. Certainly Pilate and Judas and the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate were doing evil things when they crucified Christ, but it is said that

they did exactly what God foreordained that they should do.

Not that they are blameless for it. They are to be blamed for it. But the thing is they were already wicked men.

For God to take wicked men who are already living a wicked life and say, okay, you want to be wicked? Here's the specific wicked thing that I'm going to use you to do. He's not damning somebody who would otherwise be good. He's not even making someone sin who would otherwise be sinless or righteous.

He's simply directing people whose whole life is sin into a direction of certain kinds of activities which happen to also be consistent with them, which will serve his purpose. These nations being an example, he put it into their hearts to fulfill his purpose. Not to be wicked.

They did that on their own. But since they were wicked, he says, okay, I can use that. And what does he use it for? To destroy Jerusalem.

To destroy the harlot. It says in verse 16, the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked and eat her flesh and burn her with fire. Rome, again, the fall of Rome doesn't seem to fit this so well.

Although some people would say it does. They'd say the ten horns would include the barbaric nations that came against Rome. But there's a problem there.

The barbarians who destroyed Rome had never sworn fealty to Rome. They never were part of the Roman Empire. That's why they were barbarians.

They were the ones the Roman Empire was still trying to conquer. They had not given their power to the beast, to Rome. And therefore, although the barbarians did eventually destroy and sack Rome and burn it even, they were not the same entities that had served Rome and had given their loyalty to Rome.

However, those that were loyal to the beast could sack Jerusalem and did, because it was these multi-ethnic Roman subjects that were part of the Roman army that did destroy Jerusalem. Anyway, some of these things are a little ambiguous, to say the least, and are not the easiest in the world to give certain answers about. But given the trajectory of the book in general, the identity of Babylon would seem to fit well with being Jerusalem, just as Egypt and Sodom are said to be Jerusalem.

And so that's where I go with this. Now, chapter 18, we will have very little comment to make except to say this is a long, protracted, one might even say boring chapter, because it is very repetitious and it is very archaic in its terminology because it's borrowing from Jeremiah and Isaiah and certain other Old Testament prophets. As I said, these are, the borrowings come from lament passages in the Old Testament prophets, but not always about the same entity.

There's some reference here to the fall of Sodom, the destruction of Sodom, but most of it comes from passages that are talking about the fall of Tyre in Ezekiel or the fall of Babylon in Isaiah or in Jeremiah or the fall of Edom in Isaiah and other passages. These various cities to which Jerusalem has been likened in the book of Revelation in some cases, and therefore the words of the laments against these cities that were like Jerusalem are gathered together into a collage of one long, almost monotonous lament. Now, I would say before we read it that the exact details of it may not be pressed too much because it's basically borrowing language about other cities, not Jerusalem.

However, I believe in general, it is supposed to resemble Jerusalem and its downfall. It says, After these things, I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory, and he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, Babylon, the great is fallen, is fallen and has become a habitation of demons and a prison for every foul spirit and a cage for every unclean and hated bird. Now, as far as becoming a habitation of demons, we saw what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 12, verses 38 through 45.

He said, when an unclean spirit goes out of a man, it goes looking for a new home. And if it doesn't find one, it brings back seven worse spirits than himself. And the latter state of that man is worse than the first.

Then Jesus said, And so shall it be with this evil generation. So this generation, his own generation, would be like a man who had been delivered from demons but was repossessed by the demons and worse than before. Jesus came to that generation, casting out demons everywhere he went.

He essentially probably left the place mostly demon-free. He spent three and a half years going to all the villages, casting out all the demons. And so that generation had been delivered.

But in the end, the evidence is quite clear from what Josephus describes as the behavior of the people during the siege of Jerusalem, that they definitely had come under the influence of demons in a much bigger way than they had been before. The latter end of that man is worse than the first. And so shall it be with this generation.

They did become a habitation of demons and a prison for every foul spirit. Verse 3, For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. The Jews had influenced all nations because they had been spread to all nations.

But it's not clear even what it means to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. Does this mean that they have fornicated with her? Does it mean that they suffer consequences with her? The language is poetic and drawn out in a way that it makes it kind of difficult to know precisely what it is that's being said here. It says, The kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.

Now, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her. Look over to Ezekiel chapter 16. Ezekiel 16 is a long parable where Israel is likened to a baby girl abandoned at birth.

And God finds her, keeps her alive, brings her up until she's a grown woman, and she has become beautiful, so he marries her. But then she goes out and commits adultery with all the other men around, which are, of course, in the analogy, other gods. Jerusalem worshiped other gods rather than her true God.

And Ezekiel 16, verse 26, in the midst of telling that story, it says, You also committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your very fleshly neighbors, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke me to anger. Then verse 28, You also played the harlot with the Assyrians because you were insatiable. Indeed, you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied.

Verse 29, Moreover, you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the traitor, Chaldea, and even then you were not satisfied. In other words, she's playing the harlot, so to speak, with all the nations around. With the Egyptians, with the Assyrians, with the Babylonians.

And there's another parable of the same sort in Ezekiel 23. Ezekiel 23 tells essentially the same story, but it talks about both nations, Israel and Judah. And there are two sisters who God is married to, and they also both cheat on him.

And it says in Ezekiel 23, 12, and this is talking about Jerusalem, who's symbolically called Aholabam. It says, She lusted for the neighboring Assyrians, captains and rulers, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. And verse 17, Then the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their immorality.

So she was defiled by them and alienated herself from them. Then verse 19, Yet she multiplied her harlotry in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, when she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt. Now again, this is Jerusalem playing the harlot with all the nations around.

And specifically it says the rulers, captains and rulers in verse 12. So to say of Jerusalem that she played the harlot, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her is very much true if we're thinking of the nations, the kings of the nations around. Although kings of the earth can mean just the kings of the land, the rulers of the land of Israel.

And they participated with her in her idolatry. In any case, Jerusalem seems to still be the best candidate here. Also verse 4 says, this is Revelation 18.4, And I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

This exhortation to come out of Babylon is found in Isaiah chapter 48.20. To God's people to come out of Babylon because she's going to fall. Isaiah 48.20. It's also found in Jeremiah 50 and verse 8. It's also found in Jeremiah 51 verse 6. It's also found in Jesus teaching in Luke 21. When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, flee from her.

The Christians did flee from Jerusalem to escape its fall. Just as the people from Babylon were told to flee. But you know what? Christians didn't flee from Rome before it fell.

In fact, they stayed and took over. Rome became Christian, essentially. And the Christians didn't flee from Rome when it fell.

So to call the Christians to flee from her would fit Jerusalem because its downfall would have killed the Christians in it if they had stayed. But the fall of Rome did not result in the death or particular endangerment of the church as a group. So again, I'm thinking this is Jerusalem.

Verse 5. For her sins have reached to heaven and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her justice she rendered to you. Repay her double according to her works in the cup which she has mixed, mix for her double.

In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow. For she says in her heart, I sit as a queen, I'm no widow, and will not see sorrow. Therefore her plagues will come in one day, death and mourning and famine.

And she will be utterly burned with fire for strong is the Lord who judges her. And now we read of the lament of certain groups of people who are sorry to see her go. The first are the kings of the earth or perhaps the rulers of the land of Israel.

The kings of the earth or of the land who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her when they see the smoke of her burning. Standing at a distance for fear of her torment saying, alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city, for in one hour your judgment has come. And then all the merchants of the earth or of the land will weep and mourn over her.

All the merchants in Israel no doubt did their business in Jerusalem. And they are now mourning over her, weeping and mourning just as the kings of the land did. For no one buys her merchandise anymore.

Merchandise of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet and every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron and marble and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots and the bodies and souls of men. Apparently slave trade as well. And the souls of men, it's hard to know exactly what that is, except to say perhaps she was corrupting people inwardly as well as, you know, selling people physically into slavery.

And the fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you and you shall find them no more at all. The merchants of these things who became rich by her will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing and saying, alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, scarlet and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls. For in one hour such great riches came to

nothing and every ship master, now there's a new group of people going to mourn, the ship masters and the traders at sea, every ship master and all who travel by ship, sailors and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, what is like this great city? And they threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing and saying, alas, alas, that great city in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth.

For in one hour she is made desolate. So there's three groups of people wailing here. They're all said to wail and lament or wail and weep.

First the kings of the land, then the merchants of the land and then the merchants at sea. So international traders too. Apparently the, you know, the Jewish merchants made a lot of their money trading at Jerusalem, but also international merchants did.

And so all of these groups say kind of the same thing. It says they see the smoke of her burning and they stand afar because they're afraid to come near because they may perish in the conflagration. And all of them say, amazing, this great city is falling in one hour.

And so this is a sort of a repeated chorus in a way. In verse 20, in contrast to the weeping, there's some people rejoicing. Verse 20, rejoice over her, oh heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets for God has avenged you on her.

Verse 21, then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea saying thus with violence, the great city Babylon shall be thrown down and shall not be found anymore. This of course resembles what happened at the end of Jeremiah 52, where Jeremiah gave instructions to have a scroll that contained the judgments against Babylon tied to a stone and thrown into the Euphrates river with the announcement, thus shall Babylon fall and rise no more. It'll sink and rise no more.

So throwing this stone into the sea is very much like throwing that stone with the scroll attached to it in the river Euphrates and the same kind of announcement given Babylon's down. They're not getting back up again. And by the way, Jerusalem did fall and has not really risen again.

Sure, there's a city over there, but it doesn't have a temple. It's not a religious center at all for God's people. Never will be again.

It was once the queen of the cities of the earth because it was God's wife. That's not happening again. It's down, it's sunk.

It's not going to rise again. Rome on the other hand fell, but it's still going strong. Has been going strong pretty much ever since it was founded, since the days of Romulus and Remus.

Now the announcement is made in verse 22, The sound of the harpist, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. And no craftsman of any craft shall be found in

you anymore. And the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.

In fact, all these ordinary peaceful trades and so forth will not be happening there anymore. The light of the lamp shall not shine in you anymore. The voice of the bridegroom and the bride shall not be heard in you anymore.

There are still people getting married in Rome, but they were not in Jerusalem. There are now people getting married in Jerusalem, but after Jerusalem fell, there weren't any for a long time. Hundreds of years, over a thousand years.

And the light of a lamp shall not shine, it says. The bridegroom's voice will not be heard there. No weddings.

And your merchants were the great men of the earth for by your sorcery, all the nations were deceived. So all the nations were corrupted by the compromise made by Judaism, which actually became corrupted. Originally, it was God's religion, but it became Talmudism.

It became man's tradition. Jesus actually condemned those Jewish leaders for following traditions of men instead of God. It's like they've fallen away into sorcery.

By the way, Kabbalism, I suppose, could be, in some respects, resembling sorcery. Kabbalah is mysticism, and I don't know whether it has magic and such in it, but that might even be considered to be what they replaced real Judaism with. Many Jews, not all, have gone into the Kabbalah.

And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints and of all who were slain in the land. Now, I suppose this is the place we will stop. I actually wanted to go on into chapter 19 and complete it, but I don't have time tonight.

But it, of course, does continue here into the early part of chapter 19. And after all this singing and lamenting and so forth about Babylon dies down, in chapter 19 we'll see that there's rejoicing over the marriage of the Lamb because his wife has made herself ready. And so there's the wedding supper of the Lamb in verses 8 and 9 of chapter 19.

So this is in direct contrast, of course, to the harlot. And it's interesting that the harlot had to be executed, as it was, for her harlotry before this wedding could take place. Why? Because God won't have two wives at the same time.

His harlot wife is subjected to the penalties that fall upon adultery under the law. And then God can marry another. And that is the church, the bride we see here.

And we will have to wait until tomorrow to actually get into that chapter, much as I would like to do so tonight.

OpenTheo

Revelation 19

Revelation - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an in-depth analysis of Revelation 19, discussing the fall of Babylon and the marrying of the faithful woman by God. He also touches on the concept of the bride and groom, emphasizing the importance of righteousness and how it connects to the clothing worn by the bride. Gregg further delves into the war that Christ conducts and the defeat of the beast and false prophet, ultimately leading up to the judgment of those whose names are not found in the book of life.

Transcript

It's obvious that chapter 19 begins where chapter 18 left off, where Babylon the great has fallen with much lament and much rejoicing, depending on who's looking at the situation. The kings of the earth, the merchants and the shipmasters who did business with her and committed fornication with her and got rich from their dealings with her. They've of course been wailing and mourning over her fall, but the heavens have a different attitude altogether.

According to chapter 18, verse 20, it says, rejoice over her, O heaven, and you, holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her. And so verse 19 says, after these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, Alleluia, salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God. For true and righteous are his judgments because he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants shed by her.

So this is really pretty much the last we're going to be thinking about Babylon. There's rejoicing over her demise, and as I said, I personally believe that the fall of Babylon in these previous chapters is the fall of Jerusalem. The other option, I believe, is that it's the fall of Rome, but I think it's less likely because it is at the fall of Jerusalem that a major transition in the covenants took place.

Of course, a major transition took place at the cross. Jesus instituted the new covenant, but the old covenant was still kind of functioning. It was, as the writer of Hebrews says, obsolete.

In Hebrews 8.13, it says where there's a new covenant, the old one is obsolete. And he said, is

about ready to vanish away. At the time of writing, the writer of Hebrews saw that the trappings of the old covenant, the temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, all those things relate to the old covenant, including Israel's special role as a God's special nation.

All that was about ready to be swept away, and it was, when the temple was destroyed and when Jerusalem was burned down. So, although the new covenant was instituted by Christ at his death, he rendered the old obsolete, but not completely gone. It was soon to vanish away, and it did vanish away, as Jesus said, within that generation.

He said, this generation will not pass before all these things happen. So, this transitional generation saw the introduction of the new covenant and the abolition of the old covenant, and there was this time there where it would appear that there was a little bit of both kind of hanging around. But with the fall of Jerusalem, the total end of the old covenant permanently, finally and visibly, is marked.

And therefore, it causes the new covenant to shine forth as the only remaining means by which God is relating to mankind through Christ. And what we see now, in just the next few verses, is that there's the new covenant bride that is now in view. This would not be so particularly at the fall of Rome.

The fall of Rome did not mark any particular transition in God's cosmic dealings, but the fall of Jerusalem did. And therefore, we have this also as evidence that Jerusalem falling is what we're talking about with the fall of Babylon, because the fall of the harlot clears the way for God to marry a faithful woman. Now, we might say, are you saying the church has been faithful to Christ? Yes, the church has been.

The institution that calls itself the church has been very much a harlot in many of the years and many of the locations where we've existed in the last 2,000 years. That which calls itself the church has not always been faithful, and sometimes, not only sometimes, most of the time, it's been just as unfaithful as Israel was. But the church is not that organization, and that is what makes it so difficult for the testimony of Christianity, is that there are those who are not Christian and are not the church who have assumed the label.

And by assuming the label have involved the reputation of the church and of Christ in the most scandalous behavior. But the true church is composed of those who are born of the Spirit of God, who have Christ as their head, and are thus part of His body. And if Christ is your head, that means He is directing you.

He is your Lord. Obviously, not everybody, in fact, probably most, not most of the people who have been in the organized churches could fit that description. I'm not ready to proffer any guesses about what the percentages might be, but it's quite obvious, and anyone who goes to church or has gone to church all their life, as I have, would know this intuitively.

That there's a certain percentage, and not necessarily a small percentage, in most churches of

people who are there for reasons other than being true disciples of Jesus. Jesus said, unless you forsake all that you have, you can't be my disciple. Unless you take up your cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.

Unless you hate your father, mother, wife, and children, and your own life, you cannot be my disciple. Now, once you begin to read Jesus' terms for discipleship, you begin to look at the persons in the church crowd, and maybe at yourself. And you say, was there some reason I thought these people were disciples? Are they? Am I? And, in many cases, I'm afraid we'd have to give an answer that is disappointing.

But the true church has always been made up of that remnant, that group, and although they are in the minority in Christendom, they are nonetheless millions in numbers, according to Revelation, who have been the true followers of Christ. Who have washed themselves in the blood of the Lamb, and made themselves white, and who have been faithful unto death. And they overcome the enemy by the word of their testimony in the blood of the Lamb, and by not loving their lives.

Now, again, we can say, Lord, is that me? I hope so. And, it should not be difficult for a Christian to say, of course. Of course.

I mean, that's what I signed up for. That's what being a Christian means. It doesn't mean getting a ticket to heaven and keeping a pew warm.

It means joining the army, and being part of God's plan to conquer the world, and to rule the world forever and ever and ever. That's not a small thing, and it doesn't cost a cheap amount. It costs everything.

And those who have understood that, and I'm afraid that gospel preachers in our time do not necessarily always make that so clear, so people respond to something they think is the gospel, and they don't make a decision that resembles anything like the decision to be a disciple of Jesus. And therefore, they become part of the church, without really becoming followers of Christ. But, throughout history, there have been some who responded to the gospel exactly as it's written, in the Bible, and are the true Christians.

And, we know that because John saw a multitude that no one could number, from every nation, kindred, and tongue, praising God in heaven, who were among this number. And that number, that company, are the bride. They are the faithful.

And, if one of them becomes unfaithful, they're no longer in. If a person defects from Christ, they're not in the church anymore. And therefore, the church always is comprised of those who are faithful.

And therefore, the church has always been a faithful bride. And so, we see the destruction of the harlot bride, the harlot wife. True, it doesn't say the harlot was ever a wife, but in the imagery of the Old Testament, it was always the harlotry of Judah and Israel that God

complained about, because that was his wife.

He didn't complain about other nations that were worshipping other gods. That was their business. They weren't his people anyway.

His complaint is against his people, who worship other gods. That's the harlot, his bride. And that harlot has experienced, basically, the punishment that is due.

What is due to a harlot, or to an adulterous wife? In the Old Testament, the very law under which Jerusalem lived, the penalty was stoning. Or, as we see in verse 21 of chapter 18, a mighty angel took up a stone, like a great millstone, and threw it into the sea. Reminds us of Jesus saying, if you would stumble, one of these little ones who believes in me.

And he's talking to the Jews who are trying to discount him, and trying to dissuade people from following him. Says, you'd be better off if you had a millstone around your neck and were thrown into the sea. Well, that's exactly what God now does to that segment of the Jewish population that resisted, and sought to dissuade, and to stumble, the few who followed him.

They're thrown into the sea, and that's the end of Babylon. And now we're going to see who replaces Babylon. It says in verse 3, again they said, Alleluia, and her smoke rises forever and ever.

And the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures fell down and worshipped God, who sat on the throne, saying, Amen, Alleluia. Now, it says, her smoke rises up forever and ever. This is a very good example of the apocalyptic use of forever and ever.

And smoke. You remember when we encountered this idea of smoke rising forever and ever previously in chapter 14. In a passage that traditionally has often been applied to hell.

And it talks about those who worship the beast, and his image. And in Revelation 14, 10 and 11, it says, from the middle of verse 10, it says, And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever.

And they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast, and his image, whoever receives the mark of his name. Well, if it says the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever, it has often been thought, this refers to eternal torment. In hell.

But then we have this. Babylon's smoke ascends forever and ever also. Are we to suggest that the city of Jerusalem is, that the smoke of its burning is still ascending at this moment? Now, this is not talking about post-mortem.

It's very obvious. Her smoke of her burning is mentioned several times in chapter 18. For example, in chapter 18, verse 9. It says, the kings of the earth who committed fornication live luxuriously with her, will weep and lament when they see the smoke of her burning.

Likewise, in verses 17, 18. All the shipmasters and the sailors, as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning. This is visible smoke, visible to survivors.

This is not hell. This is talking about the burning of the city and its smoke going up. Just like when Abraham looked toward Sodom the day after it was burned up.

And it says, the smoke of the city arose like the smoke of a great furnace. That is the next day, when Abraham looked in the direction of Sodom, there's nothing but smoke. There had been fire and brimstone the day before, but now only smoke.

There were no people suffering there anymore, they were dead. But the smoke was not hellfire, it was the smoke that could be seen in the sky. By a man on earth.

That is the smoke that the shipmasters are depicted as seeing, and the kings of the earth are seeing. That's her smoke, and we're told it rises forever and ever. This is not describing a post-mortem situation.

It's not even talking about an individual person suffering. It's talking about an entity, a city. And the smoke rising forever is obviously figurative, because the smoke of that city is not rising now.

You will not find, if you go to Israel, that the smoke over Jerusalem is still rising. But that's not too surprising if you learn to understand the language of the apocalyptic prophetic scriptures. Even the non-apocalyptic, non-prophetic scriptures use that kind of language.

Look at Jude. If you look at the book of Jude, verse 7, just before the book of Revelation, Jude, verse 7, says, Now, Sodom and Gomorrah have been made an example by God, because they've experienced the judgment of eternal fire. Now, again, eternal fire? Many people would say, well, that must mean they're burning in hell.

How could that be an example to unbelievers? Unbelievers can't see anyone burning in hell. This is talking about a visible example that God has given to the world of how He will deal with people like that. They have become an example by suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

The fire that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah was eternal fire. After all, it was from God, and He's eternal. Our God is a consuming fire.

God is a consuming eternal fire, and they have suffered the vengeance of His wrath. But, you might get the impression, if you didn't know otherwise, that Jude is saying that if we went over to the Dead Sea area today, we could see where Sodom was, that there's fire burning there to this day. It's eternal, never-ending fire.

This is the language of Scripture when it's using imagery of judgment. Judgment is often said to be eternal or forever, and in situations where it actually isn't, it's poetic language. Likewise,

we're told in chapter 19, verse 3 of Revelation, her, that is Babylon's smoke, rises forever and ever.

It's not a reference to hell. It's a reference to the lastingness of her judgment. Verse 4, and the 24 elders and 4 living creatures fell down and worshipped.

Verse 5, then a voice came from the throne, saying, Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great. And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty thundering, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory.

For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright. For the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Then He said to me, Right, blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And He said to me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at the feet and worshipped Him, because, oh, excuse me, but He said to me, See that you do not do that.

I am your fellow servant and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Now, here we have the announcement of the marriage of the Lamb.

The marriage supper of the Lamb has come. The bride has made herself ready. Who is this bride? Well, of course, we know it's the church.

We know from other places in Scripture, as for example, when Paul talks about marriage in Ephesians 5, he says that for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. The two shall be one flesh. Paul says this is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

He says in 2 Corinthians 11 that he had betrothed the church as a chaste virgin to Christ. Obviously betrothed to be married. This is the church that is in the covenant with God.

Now, the old covenant has passed. A new covenant has come. There's a new bride.

A bride is taken by striking a covenant. A marriage takes place when a covenant is formed between two individuals. And thus, it is the new covenant that defines this marriage.

Now, by the way, I would just jump ahead for the moment to chapter 21 and show you by way of confirmation. Revelation 21.9 said, Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife. All right.

Well, we read about the Lamb's wife, of course, in verse 7 of chapter 19. So, we're going to be reading about the same individual here. Come with me, I'll show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Verse 10, chapter 21.10 says, And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. So, he's shown the bride, which is clearly the church, and the church is the great city, the new Jerusalem. And that's not too surprising because the other city, the old Jerusalem, was likened to a harlot, Babylon.

And so, we've had two cities, two women, contrasted with each other. It's a mixed metaphor, of course, because it's hard to even imagine a city as described in chapter 21, verse 2, adorned as a bride. How do you adorn a city? How do you put on bridal clothing on a city? Obviously, the imagery is strange, but it is nonetheless communicating what we need to know.

One city is down, a new city is up. One wife is divorced and executed for her crimes. A new wife, faithful, is now being taken.

Now, it says the wedding supper of the Lamb has come, or the marriage of this Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready. Now, obviously, most of us, perhaps, have been taught to see this as the second coming of Christ. That is, we are the bride of Christ to be.

We are going to marry Christ when he comes back. You know the parable of the ten virgins, where the virgins are waiting for the appearance of the bridegroom to come to the wedding. And we understand that.

I do, anyway. Some do not. But I understand that to be about the second coming of Christ.

And the five wise virgins are prepared for him when he comes. The five foolish virgins are not. But it is the wedding that he is coming to.

And it seems like that is a parable about the second coming of Christ. If it is not, then the point I am making is, you can just set aside, but I believe that it is. And I have certainly been raised thinking of this coming of the marriage supper as a reference to the second coming of Christ.

But that is not necessarily the case. For example, if you will look over at the book of Matthew, in Matthew 9, verse 14, it says, The bridegroom is with his friends right now. This must be, I guess, the bachelor party or whatever.

He has not yet gone to take his wife at this point, but he is preparing to. He is at the bachelor party with his friends. This reference to Jesus as the bridegroom, which he makes here speaking to John's disciples, no doubt was intended to remind them of something their own master John the Baptist had said to them back in John chapter 3. Because at that time, John's disciples came to him and said, This is John 3, verse 26.

They said, Then he says in verse 29, But the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. John says, I'm the matchmaker here.

I'm not the bridegroom. I'm the one bringing the bride to the groom. The one who gets the bride is not the friend, but the groom.

And Jesus is the groom. The people are the bride. And so John had told his disciples to view Jesus and his people this way, as a bride coming to her groom.

And Jesus had told the same disciples, or at least some disciples of John, that they should remember that the bridegroom's friends don't mourn and fast during the bachelor party, or during the wedding feast either. While the bridegroom is with them, they eat and rejoice. And then of course when he's taken away from them, that's another story.

Now if you turn to Matthew chapter 22, we have this parable about the wedding feast. Matthew 22, 1, And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said, The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son. This is of course the kingdom of God, the marriage.

And he sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding, and they were not willing to come. That is the evangelists taking the gospel, calling people to come to the kingdom, to the wedding feast. And they wouldn't come.

And again he sent out other servants saying, Tell those who are invited, See I've prepared my dinner. My oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.

Now the food is prepared. There's no eaters, no one's showing up. But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, one to his business, and the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.

But when the king heard about it, he was furious, and he sent out his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.

So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. And the long and the short of it is, he kicked him out.

Now what is this about? This is about a wedding, and the story is punctuated in the middle by the burning of a city. The city is burned because it is the city of the first persons invited who rejected the invitation. After the city is burned, the invitation goes out to others.

The first persons invited to come into the kingdom of God through the preaching of the gospel were the Jews. And because they killed the messengers in many cases, God sent out his armies, the Roman armies, and burned up their city and destroyed them. It is passed over with a single verse, but it is a very major transition.

This is the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 because the first friends of God who were invited, his covenant people Israel, they did not come into the kingdom. They did not accept Christ. They did not want a part of this.

And so after that, he sends his messengers further out, further away to the Gentiles, out to the highways and byways to bring in as many as they could. And eventually the wedding feast was filled, no doubt, with these guests who were invited from all over the world, from the Gentile nations. Then, of course, there was a judgment, and he had to clean house.

He had to go in and make sure that only those who belonged there were there. But notice that after the city of Jerusalem is destroyed, there is this influx. And this is still the wedding feast.

Now, in a Jewish wedding feast, which sometimes went on for weeks, the bride and the groom might not be joined for some time, although their friends have come to the wedding. At the end of the feast, the bride goes off with the groom. But here we can see that the feast was announced before Jerusalem was destroyed, but it was not attended, not significantly anyway, until after Jerusalem was destroyed.

Now, when people begin to come into the kingdom of God after the destruction of Jerusalem, this is a process. The wedding feast lasts a while. In our case, it's been about 2,000 years, it seems.

Gentiles are still being invited in and coming in. There is a time yet future when God will come and sort it out, because good and bad are coming in. He's going to sort them out.

So the present age is the age of the wedding feast while the guests are arriving. This is the wedding feast. Now, there's not been a joining of the bride and groom yet.

That will be at the second coming of Christ, but Revelation 19, verse 7 does not announce the union of the bride and the groom, but rather simply the coming of the wedding. And therefore, at the fall of Jerusalem, the announcement is made to the world that the wedding is now. Come now.

Don't wait. The food is ready. The food is ready even before the city was burned.

So it's not like these people are coming and waiting for a feast to later show up. They're coming to a feast where the food's on the table. It's getting cold.

Show up now. And so in this age, since the destruction of Jerusalem and the influx of Gentiles, we are coming to a feast. Of course, when the early Christians met, they actually had a literal love feast when they met.

A celebration. A celebration of salvation. And of being joined to Christ.

Of having a, you know, rejoicing in the festivities. Now, on the one hand, the church is seen as the bride, but as is the case with Revelation commonly, the metaphors get mixed. Because it

says in verse 9, Then he said to me, Right blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In other words, the invited guests. In the story of Matthew 22, the church is comprised of people who are invited to the feast. The bride is not actually in the picture in that parable.

The bride is not mentioned, is not identified. So the parable doesn't involve this confusion. It just says in the parable of Matthew 22, the king was making a marriage for his son.

Presumably there's a bride somewhere, but she's not mentioned. What is mentioned is that people are invited. And so the church is comprised of people who accepted the invitation.

We are the invited guests. But of course, in the mixture of metaphors, we are also the bride. And Revelation mentions both together here.

Now it says the bride, in verse 7, had made herself ready. She's prepared for this. And how she made herself ready is the way a bride gets ready, is getting her clothes on, getting her bridal gown on, and this is grace, it's a grant from God, to be arrayed with fine linen, clean and bright.

For the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. The church is not prepared to meet Jesus until it is clothed with its righteous acts. Now this is not salvation by works.

This is granted to her. The ability to live a righteous life is a grant. It is by the grace of God that we are transformed from sinners to saints.

It is by the grace of God that we live differently than before. It is by the grace of God that we do good works and our lives are righteous in behavior. It's a grant.

It's a grace. But it is nonetheless, it shows like the clothing of a bride shows. When you see a bride, you notice her clothing.

It's visible. And so the righteous acts of the saints are visible. They're outward behavior.

There's not some kind of a hidden, imputed righteousness that no one can tell you have but by faith, you have this hidden secret righteousness inside that only God can see. That's not Christianity. It is true that we are imputed righteous by faith in Christ, but being imputed righteous does not happen without a corresponding transformation.

And if, if you look at 1 John 3, verse 7, 1 John, the same author, chapter 3 and verse 7, he says, little children, let no one deceive you. Now, just try to find out if what the preachers you've heard are deceiving you or not. Don't let anyone deceive you.

He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. Now, he doesn't say you become righteous by practicing righteousness, but of course we are righteous by faith. But how do you know if you have been made righteous by faith? Well, it shows in the way you live.

If you practice righteousness, then they obviously aren't righteous, according to this. Don't let anyone deceive you about that. Don't let anyone tell you that you can live in sin and still be a righteous person by faith.

That's not known in the scripture. No such thing is known in scripture. When Paul asked the question in Romans 6, 15, what then, shall we continue in sin because we're not under law, but under grace? He said, God forbid.

Don't you know that the one to whom you yield your members to obey, if you're obeying sin, then you're a slave of sin. You're not a slave of God. You're not righteous if you're living in sin.

You're not righteous by faith. You're not righteous by anything. You're not righteous by any description if you're not living obediently to Christ.

Not perfectly, of course. No one's perfect, and Paul made that clear in Romans 7. But the point is, we don't live in sin. Following Christ looks like something, and it looks like doing what he does.

It looks like being like him. It looks like obeying what he says. That's what following Christ looks like.

And those who do so are righteous. They are righteous by grace, but they are recognizably righteous by their behavior. And so, don't let anyone deceive you.

The person who practices righteousness, that is a righteous person. That's a person who is, in fact, imputed righteous because that is the evidence that somebody has been saved. What do you think it is we're saved from? The angel told Joseph his name is because he'll save his people from their sins.

If you're saved from your sins, then how could you live in your sins? Obviously, that doesn't make any sense. It's like if you're out drowning in the sea, and someone throws you a life preserver, and says, here, I'll save you. You say, well, can I still stay out here in the sea and still be saved from this? No, I don't think so.

Being saved from it means you're pulled out of it. If you're saved from your sins, you're pulled out of your life of sins. You live a righteous life, and you can tell who the bride is by what she's wearing.

She's wearing white linen, clean and bright, which is the righteous acts, the behavior of Christians. We might say, well, we don't want to be too harsh in our judgment. Well, you're right, we shouldn't be harsh in our judgment.

We shouldn't be too stupid in our judgment either. We shouldn't assume that someone who isn't living for Christ is a Christian because Jesus said, whoever continues in my words, you're a disciple if you continue in his words. Obedience to Christ is a mark of discipleship.

Disobedience to Christ as a habit is the mark that you're not a disciple, no matter what you claim to be. Now, John actually was so overwhelmed that he fell down to worship at the feet of this angel, but he was rebuked for that. This is going to happen again in chapter 22.

There's something apparently about the weightiness of these revelations that is, I suppose if you were there, perhaps you had to be there, but it's overwhelming. When John first saw Jesus in Revelation chapter 1, he also fell down as if he were dead. This does not seem to have been a deliberate act of worship, but just, you know, he lost all his strength like Daniel did several times when he saw visions.

He lost all his strength and just collapsed. He had to be touched to be set back on his feet and had to be strengthened supernaturally. In this case, that's not what's happening.

John is deliberately bowing down, falling down to worship this messenger. Now, you'd think the apostle would be smarter than that, and I would too. Therefore, this must have been really impressive that it would overwhelm his natural awareness that you don't bow down and worship angels.

He's just not thinking, and he gets rebuked for it. Don't do that. He says, worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

What's that mean? Well, obviously, it can be taken more than one way, but it seems in the context what it means is the spirit of prophecy, that is the whole purpose and nature of prophecy, is to testify about Jesus, not about the messenger, not about the prophet, not about the angel who's giving you the prophetic information, but Jesus who is the subject of it. It's testifying about Jesus that prophecy is, and likewise, that's one way to test prophecy. It's when the Bible says, let the prophets speak two or three and let the others judge.

How do you judge prophecy? Well, it should be testifying about Jesus, or it should be testifying from Jesus, but in any case, Jesus is the subject matter and the burden of all legitimate prophecy. The spirit of prophecy wants to talk about Jesus. Of course, it could be said that the testimony of Jesus, not the testimony about Jesus, but Jesus' own testimony is what prophecy is.

The prophet is speaking Jesus' testimonies, Jesus' words. It could go either way, but Jesus is definitely the focus of real prophecy. It's either referring to what he is testifying through the prophet, or that the prophet is testifying about Jesus.

In any case, it's all about Jesus, not about the messenger. Verse 11, Verse 12, Verse 13, Verse 14, Verse 15, Seemingly a very gory outcome here, but what is it, and when is it? Well, of course, I think many of us have been conditioned to see this as the second coming of Christ, and maybe it is. I'm not going to rule that out.

We've had the marriage feast has come, and it was announced upon the demise of the harlot, but through the entire age of the church, the Gentiles are being brought in since the city of the first invited guests, who didn't come, has been burned down. The invitation to the wedding has

gone out to the highways and byways, and they're bringing people in, and eventually the doors will be closed, and it will be time for the joining of the bride and the groom, and that joining is, I believe, at the second coming of Christ, where we actually see his face and are with him. But in the meantime, it's the wedding feast, the long feast until the bride and groom join and go off on their honeymoon.

Now, this is either describing the coming of that time when Jesus returns, and that is entirely possible in the context, or it is talking about that same time from another angle, which is another possibility. Jesus is seen on a white horse. Now, heaven opened, and he saw a white horse, but that doesn't mean the horse was coming down from heaven.

We kind of picture it that way, Jesus returning on a white horse, and the armies of heaven with him on white horses, and he's striking the nations, slaughtering the people, and so forth, so that there's these corpses everywhere, and the birds are gorged on their flesh. That could be true, because when Jesus comes back, we are told in 2 Thessalonians 1.8, 2 Thessalonians 1.8 says that he will come in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel. So, there is a destructive event on all the wicked when Jesus comes back, and this could be depicting it.

If it is, it's in a symbolic form, because, of course, the striking of the nations is with the sword out of his mouth. I believe that Jesus doesn't have a literal sword hanging out of his mouth, and while Jesus comes back, I don't think it's going to be really a sword battle when he comes. I mean, this is a language of ancient warfare, riding horses, and so forth.

Now, I realize that many Christians, and in Christian art, it's depicted sometimes that Jesus returns on a white horse. Maybe, but I think not. I am of the opinion that heaven doesn't have stalls of horses and armies that ride horses.

Now, we could be wrong about that. I could be wrong about that, but I just don't think we're called upon to believe or picture it that way, that right now in heaven there's someone taking care of thousands of horses and stalls, waiting for this day for Jesus to come back. Of all the other references to Jesus coming back, there's never a reference to him riding a horse, and when he ascended into heaven, he did not ascend on a horse, and the angels said he would return in like manner as he went away.

Now, I suppose all those things could be true, and he could still come back on a horse, but there's certainly nothing elsewhere in Scripture to associate him as a rider on a horse at his coming. If you've ever pictured it that way, it's this passage and this passage alone that has come to your mind. And so it could be a reference to the second coming of Christ at the end of the long wedding feast, at the time when he comes to actually be joined with his bride at his second coming, but it's not necessary.

I think it may be the best way to look at it, but there's always been an alternative view of this that makes some sense, and that is that this is not talking about his second coming, but about

the warfare he conducts winning the world through the preaching of the gospel in the present age. He's depicted as the word of God, a title for Jesus that's not used by anyone except John in his writings. Of course, John uses that title in John 1, 1, where he calls Jesus the Word He uses that title in 1 John 1, 1, where he calls him the Word, and now he calls him the Word again.

But remember, there's lots of titles by which Jesus could be called. He could be called the Prince of Peace. He could be called the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God.

He could be called Emmanuel. He could be called the Branch. You can call him a lot of different things, but in this vision, he is depicted specifically as the Word of God.

It is the Word of God who is depicted as conquering the nations here, and specifically with the weapon of what proceeds out of his mouth, which is a sharp, two-edged sword, a not too well concealed image for his words. What comes out of a mouth is someone's words. And if we didn't even have the confirmation of Ephesians 6, 17, which says that we take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God in Ephesians 6, 17, or of Hebrews 4, 12, where it says, the Word of God is alive and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword.

These images of the Word of God being sword-like elsewhere in Scripture only confirm what we would perhaps deduce without those confirmations, that what comes out of a man's mouth is his words, and therefore Christ's words strike the conscience of men like a sword. And we saw in an earlier lecture when we were talking about Isaiah 11, how that if you turn to Hosea 6, 5, which we won't do right now, it says that God, through the prophets, had hewed and slain the people of Israel. Now the prophets didn't really hew and slay people, not literally, but their words did.

And so also Christ, his words like a sword slay, not literally, not physically, although the language certainly is that of physical carnage. Dead bodies everywhere, birds eating them, certainly the imagery is played up to the hilt. No pun intended about the hilt.

But the truth is that in the apocalyptic language it is possible that we're looking at a spiritual victory, a spiritual set of victories. The fact that he's on a horse even may suggest this very thing. Why so? Because if you look back at Zechariah chapter 10, Zechariah chapter 10 and verse 3, not talking about this, but talking about actually, I believe, the Maccabean War.

In my opinion, I believe that Zechariah 10 is talking about the Maccabean War. But in describing it quite figuratively, Zechariah 10, 3 says, My anger is kindled against the shepherds and I will punish the goat herds for the Lord of hosts will visit his flock, the house of Judah and will make them his royal horse in the battle. That is to say, in God's battle against his enemies, he will take his people, Judah, and ride upon them as it were.

Make them his horse in the battle. They will be the vehicle that carries him forward in the battle. And that imagery could well be implied here.

Christ is not seen necessarily coming down from heaven. The heavens open just means he's

seen to have a vision and it's taking place up there, you know, above him. He's watching this drama.

And this rider on the white horse does not necessarily appear to be moving vertically but horizontally going to all the nations around the globe and striking them with the sword and conquering them with the sword of his mouth. Carried along on a white horse. If the church could be viewed as the horse and the sword as his word, then it's a very simple matter to identify this as the gospel going forth to the nations defeating them.

But of course, the gospel defeats us. It has defeated all of us. We were his enemies and now he's conquered us with his gospel.

We're now his friends. We've now been slain. We've taken up our cross.

We've died to ourself. It's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And therefore, there is a sense in which the language of this can be applied to something that is not the second coming of Christ but rather the going forth of the gospel to the nations and making its conquests there.

And like I said, every one of us in this room is one who has been conquered. We were born enemies of God but today we're his friends. What happened? He defeated us.

He conquered us. He overthrew the resistance. And he didn't do it by force.

He did it by his word, by his gospel preached to us. And so, this is an alternative way that many people have seen it. Now, I will say that it's difficult to see it that way to tell you the truth partly because of the graphic imagery of carnage and dead bodies and things like that.

And it doesn't seem like a positive image. You'd think that conquering the world with the gospel and converting people, that'd be a very positive, upbeat image to see all these people coming to Christ. And instead, it looks like they're totally destroyed.

And therefore, it may raise questions about this. It depends, of course, on the degree to which a person is willing to disattach himself from anything like a literal interpretation and just get from this the idea that the nations are under attack by the church with the gospel. Satan's kingdom is being defeated.

The beast and the false prophet are actually ultimately defeated. And I think that will not happen until the end. That is the final outcome of this war is the defeat of the beast and the false prophet.

And I suspect that that is at the second coming of Christ. I say that because Paul talks about his enemies being destroyed, that is, God's enemies being destroyed at the final day. We read in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the man of sin, the son of perdition, will be consumed and destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming.

We read in 1 Corinthians 15 that Christ must continue, as he does now, to reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. You and I are some of the enemies that have already come under his feet, but he's going to put all his enemies under his feet. And the last enemy he's going to defeat is death.

And that happens at the resurrection. So there is a... Christ is reigning at the right hand of God, defeating, one by one, all who stand in opposition to him. Fortunately, this defeat that he is accomplishing is a benign defeat in that he conquers us by winning us.

You know, Abraham Lincoln was criticized by his friends because he was a little too generous even toward his political opponents. And they said, Mr. Lincoln, don't you understand that it's the nature of politics that you need to defeat your adversaries? And he said, well, if I turn my adversaries into my friends, haven't I defeated my adversaries? And that's, in a sense, the way that Christ defeats his adversaries. He turns them into his friends.

He takes those who are enemies of God and redeems them, saves them, transforms them, gives them a new heart of flesh instead of the heart of stone, puts his spirit within them and makes disciples out of them. This is how the nations are to be conquered. But ultimately, of course, there will be a judgment.

And when he arrives, those who remain resistant will, in fact, be consumed by the brightness of his appearing. Those who resist him to the end will be judged. And so it may well be that verses 11 through 16 are really describing the progress of the gospel.

Very much the same thing as in the parable of the wedding feast after the city was burned down, the messengers were sent out to the highways and byways to bring them all in, the Gentiles. And that process could be seen in terms of the spiritual warfare that the scripture elsewhere teaches of us being engaged in. Paul talks about us, we're the ones wielding the sword.

We're the church. We're carrying the word of God. We take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, and we go out and we penetrate the enemy's territory and use the gospel to bring people over to Christ's side.

He defeats those enemies by making them friends just like he did to you and me. But then it may also be that verses 17 through 21 look at the end of that process. At the very end, when he's conquered all that he will conquer by the word, then he appears.

And it's annihilation. It's destruction. It's judgment.

And the beast and the false prophet, we're told in verse 20, are captured alive and thrown into the lake of fire. We're not told that here, but in the next chapter their experience in the lake of fire is described for us. In chapter 20 in verse 10, where we read, the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are.

And they will be tormented day and night, forever and ever. Of course, the degree to which we are supposed to take literally this forever and ever may be open to question in view of some of the passages we've seen about other things that are said to be forever or eternal, which is using hyperbole. But even if this is literal, I'd point out that the only persons that are said to be tormented in the lake of fire forever and ever are the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, none of which are actually humans.

I mean, the beast and the false prophet, I believe, are systems, not individual people. Later on in Revelation 20, we'll see that death and Hades, verse 14, chapter 20, verse 14, death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. Death and Hades are not people either.

They are personified in the book of Revelation, but they're not people. So, in the lake of fire, we find these characters in the drama, as it were. All the bad guys end up in the lake of fire.

And so do the people who resist him. In verse 15 of chapter 20, anyone not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. And so we first read of the lake of fire here in chapter 19, verse 20, and that's the place where the beast and the false prophet are tossed in alive.

Then we read of the devil being thrown in there in chapter 20, verse 10. And then we read of death and Hades being cast in there in verse 14. Then verse 15 of chapter 20, we find all the people who aren't written in the book of life cast in there.

But the only parties that are actually said to be tormented there permanently are the devil and the beast and the false prophet. We're not told that death and Hades are tormented or that the people are tormented. You can throw different objects into the same fire.

Some of them will burn up. Some of them will be sanitized. But it's the same fire.

And so we'll talk more, of course, about the lake of fire when we come to chapter 20, although there will be other things in chapter 20 that will command our attention more importantly. So I just wanted to point out at this point, with the first appearance of the lake of fire, the first parties thrown in apparently are the beast and the false prophet. But then eventually everyone who's opposed to God ends up in that place.

And thus, whether the rider on the white horse is or is not, in reference to the second coming of Christ, it would appear that the closing verses of chapter 19 are best related to the second coming of Christ because we find no more of the beast or false prophet after that point on earth. And that would seem to suggest the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus Christ. And then we come to chapter 20, which we will do after we take a break.

OpenTheo

Revelation 20

Revelation - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an interpretation of Revelation chapter 20, which is considered a controversial chapter in the Bible. Gregg discusses the representation of the thousand-year period in the chapter, which he believes to be a symbolic representation of a lengthy period of time. He also discusses the first resurrection and the difference between physical and spiritual resurrections. Gregg believes that the binding of the devil is a symbolic representation of a long period of time when Satan's power is curtailed, and interference with the church's mission is reduced.

Transcript

At this point, we're turning to Revelation chapter 20, which is, some scholars say, the most controversial chapter in the Bible. Now, you might not have heard as much controversy about this chapter as about some other things, but the reason it's called that is because all theological systems divide along the lines of what they make of the millennial kingdom. Now, by millennial, we mean the thousand-year reign.

There's only one place in the Bible that mentions a thousand-year reign, and that is in Revelation 20. So you might say, well, why would it be that the subject of a single chapter would be the issue over which all theological systems divide? And the answer is that even though there's only one chapter that mentions a thousand-year reign, there are many passages in the Bible that talk about the reign of Christ without mentioning a thousand years. Certainly, the Old Testament passages about the Messiah describe a kingdom of the Messiah and his reign.

And that is basically the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of God, the ultimate purpose of God in history. So, although there's only one chapter that speaks of a thousand years in connection with this reign, the reign of the Messiah, the kingdom of God, in other words, is the primary subject of all the Bible, and especially of Christ's teaching in the New Testament. So what we think about this reign of Christ as described here actually affects everything we think about the fulfillment of God's purposes in the world.

And we will read in this chapter about a thousand-year period. It will be mentioned six times in this one chapter, the thousand years. And the theological opinions divide over whether the

thousand years is a literal thousand years that will occur after the second coming of Christ.

This is called the pre-millennial view because it holds that there will be a coming of Christ before the millennium. That's pre-millennial return of Christ. Then there's also a view that there will be a literal or almost literal thousand years reign before Jesus comes back.

And that's the teaching of post-millennialism. They believe in a coming of Christ after the thousand years, post-millennial return of Christ. And their view is that the gospel will be preached so effectively in the end times, at some point in the future, that essentially the whole world will have been converted or Christianized.

And therefore, there will be a thousand years. They don't necessarily always say it's a literal thousand years, but there will be a lengthy period of time during which the world continues to exist and world history goes on. But now, in a new era where Christ is acknowledged as king by all people, where every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Christ is Lord, and the world goes on.

So that the thousand year reign is something that occurs within history and which basically happens before Jesus comes back. The amillennial view holds that the thousand year reign is essentially co-extensive with the age of the church. In other words, that the church age from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ is what is symbolically referred to as the thousand years here.

Now, it's no secret to our listeners that I believe in the amillennial position, though I was actually raised pre-millennial and taught that for a long time, many years. And I'm also now not unsympathetic with the post-millennial view. That is, I love the vision of post-millennialism, of the idea of Christ through the gospel conquering all the nations and ruling the world that way.

But I just don't understand this chapter that way. I don't understand, therefore, the millennial question in a post-millennial or a pre-millennial way. I have come to believe in the amillennial view, and it is that view that I will be sharing with you.

In order to do that, we need to look at the whole chapter at a glance. And so let's read through the 15 verses without comment, and I'll go through and analyze it after we've seen the big picture. It says, And I saw thrones and they who sat on them, and judgment was committed to them.

And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.

This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power.

But they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him for a thousand years. Now, when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

And the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.

And there was no place found for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God. And the books were opened and another book was opened, which is the book of life.

And the dead were judged according to the works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Then death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Now, of course, one of the main debates about this chapter is its chronology. When does it occur? And right at the outset, the premillennialists has a prima facie advantage. Because the premillennialists believe that Jesus comes back before the thousand year reign.

And in Revelation 19, we saw what looked very much like the coming of Christ. We saw a great slaughter of the wicked. We saw the beast of the false prophet captured and thrown into the lake of fire at the end of chapter 19.

There is some evidence that we're looking there. I would say the best evidence is that chapter 19, at the end, is in fact describing the second coming of Christ. And therefore, when you come to chapter 20, perhaps one's instincts would suggest that this must be things that are going to happen after the second coming of Christ.

And therefore, the thousand years is placed where the premillennialists place it, after Jesus has come back. But there's some danger in making that assumption for the simple reason that we have already seen a breakup of chronology in the book of Revelation. That is, sometimes the book of Revelation tells the story and then goes back and tells it again.

It'll tell the story all the way to the end and then it'll start over. We saw this, for example, in chapter 11, where the seventh trumpet sounded. It certainly looked as much as any other passage in the Bible.

It looked like the second coming of Christ and I take it to be. I take chapter 11 and the seventh

trumpet, verses 15 through 19, to be about the second coming of Christ at the end of the world. But then the very next chapter, 12, begins with the birth of Jesus again.

The woman who's pregnant and gives birth to a male child who's to rule the nations with a rod of iron. So we have the end of the story in chapter 11 and the beginning of it in chapter 12. Likewise, we saw in chapter 14 and verse 8 that it was announced that Babylon had fallen.

And in chapter 16, verse 19, it said the great city was divided into three parts and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. So we've seen essentially the end of Babylon in chapter 16.

But chapter 17 reintroduces Babylon alive and well. In fact, seemingly treating it as if this is the first time we've ever heard of Babylon. And she's seen as a harlot riding on a beast and we see the destruction of Babylon laid out again.

So we see again and again in Revelation, the story reaches an end of a sort. And then it resumes at the beginning again and tells the same story again. And that being so, we cannot rule out the possibility that chapter 19, in fact, does describe the second coming of Christ.

Without suggesting that chapter 20 must carry on the story beyond that point. Chapter 20 can go back to the beginning and start over. And that is at least a possibility and I believe the evidence will favor that option.

Now, in deciding whether the millennial reign, so called, begins at the second coming of Christ or at the first coming of Christ, we'll have to look at the hints that are given to us within the passage itself. Let's look at what is not controversial. Let's analyze the chapter in a way that nobody will dispute because it's just observation, not interpretation.

In the first three verses of Revelation 20, we see an angel with a chain binding the dragon and putting him in a pit. We are told that this will last for a thousand years. We're told that he is bound so that he might not deceive the nations anymore.

But when the thousand years are over, we are pre-announced, pre-told, that the dragon will be let go for a little while. But the action of the first three verses is simply the binding of the dragon, whom we know to be Satan. So Satan is bound in the first three verses.

Then we have three verses describing that period of time during which he is bound. It is described in a number of ways. John sees the souls of those who are beheaded reigning with Christ.

We're told that this is the first resurrection and that they reign with Christ for a thousand years. This is no doubt the thousand years during which Satan is bound. And so we have the binding of Satan for a thousand years in verses one through three.

Then we have a description of things transpiring within the thousand years that he is bound in

verses four through six. That is three more verses. And then in the following three verses, six through nine, we have events that occur in what is called a little while.

At the end of the thousand years, Satan is released for a little while. And what he does during that time is recorded in the next verses. Verses seven, eight, and nine.

At least up to the beginning of verse nine. But verses nine through fifteen then describe events that happen after those things. This is a chronological account within itself.

You've got the binding. We've got the period during which the binding is in effect. We've got the end of the binding where he is released.

And then we have the judgment upon him which presumably is last of all. And so verses nine through fifteen would appear to describe events that are after this sequence of things. After the thousand years.

After the little while. Now, I'd like to begin at the end of this story and work backward if we can. Because what happens at the end of all of this is the second coming of Christ.

Now, if I could demonstrate that, it would demonstrate that Christ didn't come at the beginning of the thousand years. But rather at the end. And then we would have to identify the thousand years with something prior to the second coming of Christ.

We would either be amillennial or postmillennial then. Let's first of all deal with the question of whether the premillennial view is viable. The premillennial view is that Jesus came back at the beginning of this time.

That this thousand years began at the second coming. Now, I would point out there's no reference at all in the whole chapter to Jesus being on earth. If he had come back, that's where we would expect to find him.

There is no reference to him being on earth in this chapter. In fact, the people who are reigning with him are apparently in heaven with him. Because he doesn't see them in resurrected bodies.

Which would be in fact the case if Jesus came back. When Jesus comes back, we'll be resurrected in bodies. Instead, he sees the souls of those who are martyrs reigning with Christ.

He doesn't say whether they're in heaven or earth, but that's easy enough to deduce. When and where would you ever see the souls of people disembodied? It can only be after they've died and before they're resurrected. The only time you could ever suggest that a person's soul is separate from his body would be after he departs from his body at death and before he returns to his body in the resurrection.

These souls of the martyrs that are reigning are before the resurrection. Therefore, that is before the second coming of Christ. When Christ comes, he'll raise the dead.

These have not been raised. They are in heaven reigning with Christ. Presumably, Jesus is also in heaven with them.

Because that's where they're with him, reigning. This alone might be enough to settle the question. Certainly, there's more that needs to be said because of the strong resistance to this position that now exists among premillennialists.

Let's look at verses 9 through 15 first of all. What are the elements there? First of all, fire comes down from heaven and defeats and destroys the devil and his armies who are encamped around the beloved city. Fire from heaven comes down and destroys them.

The dragon, the devil, is then thrown into the lake of fire along with the beast and the false prophet. Then we read that there's a resurrection of the dead. All who are in the graves and all who are in the sea who died and were buried there, they come out and they come to a general judgment.

As a result of the judgment, some are apparently saved and some are clearly thrown into the lake of fire. Now, it doesn't mention any being saved at this point. Some would say, well, this is not a resurrection that includes the righteous.

You see, the premillennial view holds that when Jesus comes back, the righteous will be raised, but the wicked will not be raised until after the millennium. Why would they say that? Well, we see very clearly after the millennium in the story, there's a resurrection. It does not specifically mention righteous people, but it does mention people thrown into the lake of fire.

So the premillennialist has the luxury of saying this is a resurrection that only involves the wicked and not the righteous. After all, the righteous are mentioned earlier in verses 5 and 6 as being in the first resurrection. And so the premillennialist can see there are two resurrections, the resurrection of the righteous at the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the wicked after the millennium.

These two resurrections, the righteous at the beginning of the millennium and the unrighteous at the end of the millennium, clearly are separated from each other by at least a thousand years. This is the premillennial view. And the reference to the first resurrection in verses 5 and 6 is very helpful to the premillennialist, because it does mean then we have two resurrections separated by a thousand years.

And certainly the first one, if it is the resurrection of the righteous, it must be at the second coming of Christ. So we have the second coming of Christ earlier than the millennium or leading up to the millennium. These people in the millennium are participants in the first resurrection.

And then later others are resurrected after a thousand years. This is a very strong argument for premillennialism. Not strong enough in my opinion, but I just want you to be aware of it.

We will be dealing with this argument. But suffice it to say that at the end of the thousand years we see a number of things. First of all, fire from heaven comes down and destroys the wicked.

Secondly, and I didn't mention this a moment ago, in verse 11, there is a great white throne set and the heavens and the earth flee away from the face of the one sitting on the throne. This person is Christ. And by the way, if the glory of Christ is so great at this point that the heavens and the earth cannot endure his glory sitting on the throne, it invites the question, why wasn't his glory so great a thousand years earlier when he showed up? If Jesus came back at the beginning of the thousand years, glorified, so that he consumed the wicked with the brightness of his appearing, as it says in 2 Thessalonians 2, why was it that the heavens and the earth didn't flee away at that time? Why were the heavens and the earth able to endure the glory of Jesus at his second coming and endure for another thousand years, but then his glory somehow is intensified so that the heavens and the earth could not endure the sight of his glory? It's a problem for premillennialists, I think.

But the point is, the heavens and the earth flee away in verse 11. And of course, when you get to chapter 21, he says, I saw new heavens, new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. So what do we got? We've got the fire from heaven.

We've got the end of the heavens and the earth. We've got the resurrection and we've got the judgment. Those are the factors that we find in verses 9 through 15.

All of them at the end of this period that includes the thousand years and the little while. I would like to argue that we can show conclusively that all four of these things, the fire from heaven, the end of the heavens and the earth, the resurrection and the judgment all occur at the second coming of Christ. If this is correct, then we have placed the second coming of Christ chronologically at the end, not the beginning of this chapter.

Can that be done? What about this fire from heaven? In second Thessalonians chapter one. And by the way, let me just say that we we need to use books like the gospels and the epistles, which are not written in apocalyptic imagery to give us our doctrines that we then will recognize as retold in the in the symbolic visions of Revelation. We don't use Revelation to interpret the rest of the Bible.

You don't take what is obscure and use that superimpose what you get from that on passages that are written in more literal form. You follow the literal language to get your doctrine and then you recognize that doctrine in the symbolism of a much more obscure passage. That's the way to do hermeneutics.

Thessalonians is not written in apocalyptic literature. It's just a letter that Paul's writing to people describing the future. And in second Thessalonians chapter one, verse six, he says, Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you and to give you who are troubled rest with us.

When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we are told that when Jesus comes back, it'll be in flaming fire, taking vengeance on the wicked. That is the depiction we see in Revelation 20 in verse nine.

The wicked are encamped around the saints and flaming fire comes from heaven and consumes them, just as Paul associated with the second coming of Christ. By the way, if Jesus did come at the beginning of the millennium, he would have come as Paul described, destroying those who are wicked and who don't obey the gospel. That means that they would have been dispensed with a thousand years earlier than we read it happening in Revelation 20 in verse nine.

The wicked would have been destroyed at the coming of Christ, as Paul said. But you see, it is the coming of Christ that we're reading about in Revelation 20 in verse nine. This can be established by further proofs.

In 2 Peter 3.10, Peter says, But the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. This I take to be the second coming of Christ. I don't know of any better theories.

I do know of hyper-preterists who do believe this is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. We will discuss when we get to Revelation 21 and 22 the merits and demerits of that theory. Suffice it to say, at this point, most Christians, including myself, do believe the day of the Lord that comes as a thief in the night is the second coming at the end of the world.

And it is certainly described as being the end of the world. It says, In which, that is, in the day that Jesus comes, the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat. Both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hasting the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Now, consider Peter's eschatology here. He says the day of the Lord is going to come like a thief in the night.

What's going to happen? The heavens and the earth are going to be dissolved. Well, that's what happens in Revelation 20 and verse 11, isn't it? The heavens and the earth flee away from the face of Him who is on the throne. And then what does Peter say in verse 13? We're looking for a new heavens and a new earth.

Interestingly, he wasn't looking for a millennial reign of Christ. He apparently didn't know about that. He makes no reference to such a thing.

He says when Jesus comes, we're going to have a new heaven and a new earth. That's what happens in what? Chapter 21, verse 1 of Revelation. That is, at the end of Revelation 20, and the

opening of chapter 21, we have the vanishing of the heavens and the earth as they are now, and their replacement by a new heavens and a new earth.

And that's what Peter thinks is going to happen when Jesus comes back. He says we're looking for... Now, if he was a premillennialist, he'd say, we're looking for a thousand year reign of Christ when He returns. Peter knew nothing of such a doctrine.

It hadn't been introduced to the church yet in his lifetime. And he thought we are looking for that which comes after the thousand years of Revelation 20. We're looking for a new heavens and a new earth.

That's what we're looking for because we expect the present heaven and earth to dissolve at the coming of Jesus. Therefore, we've seen from Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1, 8, that fire from heaven accompanies Jesus at His coming. We see fire from heaven in Revelation 20, in verse 9. We see from Peter in 2 Peter 3, that the destruction of the heavens and the earth and their replacement by a new heavens and a new earth are expected at the second coming of Christ.

We find that in Revelation 20, in verse 11. Now, what about the resurrection and the judgment? Now, the premillennialist believes the resurrection that we find at the end of chapter 20 is only the resurrection of the lost. The righteous are not there because they've been resurrected previously a thousand years earlier.

But, is that really true? The same author who wrote the gospel of John wrote the book of Revelation. And, we may assume that his theology remained the same in both writings. In John chapter 5, quoting Jesus, in John 5, 28, Jesus is quoted as saying, Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.

Now, Jesus is clearly talking about the resurrection because He talks about people who are in their graves coming out. This is not figurative. This is bodies in the grave.

This is not a spiritual resurrection, but a physical one. And, He says that will happen at a certain hour. Certainly, the word hour suggests not an extended period of time, at a certain point in time.

The hour is coming in which all who are in their graves will hear His voice. Now, is this the first or second resurrection He's talking about? Is He talking about the resurrection of the righteous here? Or, is He talking about the resurrection of the wicked in this particular hour of which He speaks? Well, He says all of them. Some will come to a resurrection of life, some to a resurrection of condemnation.

Jesus was only aware of one resurrection, one moment in time, one hour, in which everyone who is dead would come out at the same time, the good and the bad. Jesus didn't know about resurrections being divided into two separate resurrections, one for the good and one for the

bad. Neither did Paul.

In Acts chapter 24, when Paul is standing before Felix and trying to explain his views and how inappropriate it is for the Jews to accuse him of heresy since he believes the same thing they do on this key subject, Paul says in Acts 24, 15, I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead. Now, does he mean the righteous or the wicked one? Both. Of the just and the unjust.

There's a resurrection of the dead. The just and the unjust will participate in it. You do not find any reference in Jesus or Paul or any apostle to more than one resurrection.

In fact, the righteous and the unrighteous will rise the same day. This is clearly taught in John chapter 6. John chapter 6 and verse 39. Jesus said, This is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all that he has given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

Verse 40. And this is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him, that's the Christians, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day. Likewise, in verse 44.

No one can come to me unless the Father draws him, that's the Christians being drawn, and I will raise him up at the last day. How about verse 54 of the same chapter? Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. This seems to be like a broken record.

He keeps talking about the people who are his people, who eat his flesh, drink his blood, who have eternal life, whom the Father draws and who come to him, who see the Son and believe in him, and have everlasting life. These people, the church, the righteous, he will raise them up what day? The last day. But what about the thousand years that follow that? There aren't a thousand years that follow that.

It's the last day. The day which has no others following it. That's why it's called the last one.

Now, in John 12, in verse 48, Jesus said, he who rejects me and does not receive my words has that which judges him. The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. Oh, that same day.

That's the day he's raising up his people, the one he called the last day. What's he also doing? He's also judging the wicked, judging those who reject him. Everybody's judged the same day.

The righteous rise, the dead rise. They all go to the great white throne and stand before him. Remember what Jesus taught in the parable of the sheep and the goats? It's in Matthew 25, in verse 31.

Matthew 25, 31, he said, when the Son of Man will come in his glory and all his holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory and he will call all the nations before him and he

will separate between the nations as a shepherd separates between the sheep and the goats. So when Jesus comes back, sits on his throne, calls all the nations before him, that means some are going to have to come out of the graves because a lot of them have died. The resurrection takes place.

Everyone stands before God. He separates between them at that time between sheep and goats. The goats clearly, as the story progresses, are lost.

The sheep are saved. So the goats, we are told in verse 46, Matthew 25, 46 says, these will go away to everlasting punishment. That's where the goats go.

But the righteous go into the millennial reign, right? No, the righteous go into eternal life, not a thousand year interim, but an eternal state. When Jesus comes back, all people are brought before him, good and bad, sheep and goats. They are consigned to their eternal fates at that point.

There are none going into a temporary a thousand year fate. Jesus knows nothing of a millennium. There's no reference in any of the teachings of Christ to a millennium.

There's no reference in the teachings of Paul or James or Peter to a millennium. Look what Paul says about the subject in Romans 8. In Romans 8, Paul said, in verse 18, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. When? He's going to tell us.

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. So the glory that awaits us is going to be what he calls the revealing of the sons of God for who they are. For the creation, that'd be the heavens and the earth, presumably, was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope.

That would be apparently at the fall. The fall brought the curse upon the creation, and the creation's been subjected to this against its own will. Because, verse 21, the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Now the creation will be set free from the bondage of corruption that came at it during the fall, the curse. What we will find in Revelation 21, of course, or actually 22, verse 3, about the new Jerusalem and the new heavens and earth is it says there is no more curse. In the new heavens and new earth, the curse is gone.

Paul's talking about that. The curse that was imposed on the world will be removed from the world. The creation will be delivered from this condition.

Of course, he's talking about the new heavens and new earth. Then he says, verse 22, for we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now, not only they, but we also, who have the first fruits of the spirit, even ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for, what? The adoption, the redemption of our body. That's the resurrection.

That's when the creation is going to be delivered from the bondage of decay. That's when the new heavens, new earth, the curse is lifted, when we are resurrected. When's that? That's when Jesus comes back.

So Paul's theology, and Peter's, and Jesus' is that there is a last day. In that day, the dead will rise. All will be judged.

They'll be consigned to eternal fates. The heavens and the earth will vanish. There'll be a new heavens, new earth.

That's everything that we read about at the end, not the beginning of Revelation 20. So, if we take the passages in the scripture that are not written in symbolism, we gain this eschatological picture. There is a day of judgment.

It's the day of the Lord. It's the day of Christ, the day of God, Peter calls it. It's the last day, Jesus calls it.

It's the day when the righteous will rise. The wicked will also rise and be judged. The earth will be dissolved.

The heavens will burn up. There'll be a new heavens, new earth. All those things that happen at the end of Revelation 20 happen when Jesus comes back according to the testimony of the remainder of the Bible outside of Revelation.

Revelation does not contradict, does not introduce new eschatology contrary to what Peter, Paul, Jesus, and even John elsewhere present. It is telling the same story in symbolic language as Revelation does, but we can see the second coming of Christ is not at the beginning of the thousand years, but it's at the end, which means that we either have an amillennial position or a postmillennial position. You see, remember, the postmillennial view is that even in our future where we stand now, there is still a time to look forward to when the world will be Christianized for a lengthy period of time.

At the end of that time, Jesus will come. So the postmillennial view places the coming of Christ at the end of the thousand years, which is, of course, the proper place to put it, as we've seen. But the amillennial view does the same, but differently.

The amillennial view doesn't consider that the thousand years is a thousand years of actual peace on earth because the world has been Christianized, which ends with the second coming of Christ, but the thousand years is the whole age of the church, including the part we're living in. And so both the amillennial view and the postmillennial view have this in common. They both believe the so-called millennium will end when Jesus returns.

The difference is that the amillennialist sees the thousand years as representing the whole period of the church age, the postmillennialist only conditions that will prevail during a lengthy period at the end of the church age, but within the church age nonetheless. So both of them

place the coming of Christ at the end of the total period. Now, let's go back and look at what happened in the first eight verses, because this is going to have to be explained biblically as well.

If this whole period of time ends with the coming of Christ, then we're either looking at a future millennial kingdom before the coming of Christ, which the postmillennialists expect, or we're just looking at the church age. And we will, of course, have to explain what that first resurrection is, because it does suggest something of more than one resurrection, and yet every other passage in the Bible that talks about the resurrection makes it one event. So what does John here mean when he talks about the first resurrection contrasted with the second? That can be answered without serious difficulty.

Now, the first three verses, he saw an angel coming down from heaven having the key to the bottomless pit, and a chain. And he lays hold on the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, bound him for a thousand years, cast him in the bottomless pit, and shut him up and set a seal on him so that he should not deceive the nations anymore till the thousand years were finished, that after these things he must be released for a little while. So we see the binding of the devil.

This is all very symbolic. Many people don't really take it symbolically. Pre-millennialists think it's more or less literal.

They might admit that, you know, you can't really bind the devil with a literal chain. But maybe there's like a spiritual chain or something, because the devil's a spirit. And by the way, he's not literally a dragon either.

That's, you know, he's not a dragon. He's like a spiritual being. He's not a mythical animal or a reptile.

He's called both a dragon and a serpent in this chapter, neither of which are literal. So already we're getting kind of moved from a strictly literal viewpoint. We've got a spiritual being depicted as a reptile, and we've got something binding him, which is described as a chain.

But it can't be anything like we think of as a chain. It must represent some other kind of binding. Then you've got this pit that's bottomless, the abyss, that could be literal.

I mean, although it could be figurative too. In any case, it's got a lid and a lock and a seal. You know, it's tied down pretty good.

The idea here is of a total, you know, incarceration that cannot be broken free from by the devil until someone external to him lets him out, which they will in verse 7. But what is it talking about? First of all, the symbolism needs to be acknowledged. We've already pointed out some points of it that are symbolic. I believe the whole thing is symbolic.

Why say part of it is and the rest isn't? Where are you going to draw the line? The thousand

years, I believe, is symbolic. Of what? Of just a long period of time. Like when Psalm 90 in verse 4 says to God, A thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

Now, the psalmist is not making a one-to-one correspondence between a thousand years and a one day. He's saying a thousand years is like yesterday, or it's even like a watch in the night. That's three hours.

So, in other words, he's not trying to make some kind of a correspondence. He's trying to say that what to us is an extremely long time, like a thousand years, is really to God just a really short time. It's like yesterday, or like a few hours only.

And so Peter repeats that in 2 Peter 3, where he says, A day to the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day, making the same point that Psalm makes in similar language. That's, of course, in 2 Peter 3 and verse 8. So, a thousand years just means a long time, in contrast to a shorter time, a day, or a watch in the night, or whatever. A thousand isn't literal.

It just means a long time, indeterminate length. And that is in keeping with the way a thousand is generally used in the Bible. When we read that God keeps covenant to a thousand generations, it's not necessary for us to think the number thousand is literal.

When it says that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, it need not be a literal thousand, a statistical number. When the psalmist says, A day in your courts is better than a thousand. Again, thousand is being used consistently in these passages to simply mean an indeterminate large number.

And that's in the books of the Bible that are not as symbolic as the book of Revelation. If it's not used literally in those books, then to impose a literal meaning on it when it occurs in the book of Revelation would be extremely poor hermeneutics. A thousand years just means a long time.

It's not approximate or exact. It's just symbolic. It could be ten thousand years, for all anyone knows.

It's just a long time. It's not necessary to try to estimate it. By making literal estimates, people have made some big mistakes in calculating the time of the coming of Christ and so forth.

But being literal here is a mistake. The dragon is bound, in some sense, for a long period of time, after which he's released for a short period of time, just as indeterminate in its length as the longer period of time is. Now, what is he bound from? He's bound from deceiving the nations.

He's bound so that he might not deceive the nations. When he is released in verse 7 and 8, it says he goes out to deceive the nations. What this devil is about is deceiving the nations, the Gentiles.

And when he's bound, that curtails his activity of deceiving the nations. I'd like to suggest to you that this occurred at the first coming of Christ. And I wouldn't have thought that if Jesus hadn't said so himself.

Because it's kind of counterintuitive, really. But since Jesus said it, I can't really do away with what he said on the matter. He said, in Matthew 12 and verse 29, or else how can one enter a strong man's house? By the way, all commentators agree he means by strong man, Satan.

He's entering Satan's house. How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, which is what Jesus was doing and what he's explaining? This conversation took place because they said he's casting out demons by Beelzebub. No, there's a better explanation than that, certainly.

I am casting out demons because I am plundering Satan's house. And you cannot enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless you first bind the strong man. Now what Jesus is saying is there's things you can see and there's things you can't see but you can deduce from what you can see.

What you can see is I have come into a strong man's house, Satan, and I'm plundering his house without any resistance from him. He cannot stop me. I can cast demons out of anyone I want to because I'm Jesus, and I am plundering the strong man's house.

Now he says you should be able to deduce something from that because you can't do that. You can't just walk into a strong man's house and have your way with his stuff unless you just render him, you have to incapacitate him. You've got to bind him.

You've got to do something that prevents him from being able to resist you. Now here the imagery is a binding. In the parallel in Luke, the imagery is a little different.

In the parallel in Luke he says when a strong man, fully armed, guards his house, his goods are at peace, but when one stronger than he comes, Jesus said, he takes away all his armor in which he trusted and plunders his house. That parallel is in Luke chapter 11, verses 21 through 23. Same teaching, slightly different images.

In this case, in Matthew, he has to bind the strong man. In Luke, he just has to take away the guy's armor. Both are images that are not literal, but they both suggest if you're going to have your way in a strong man's domain, you're going to have to disable him from any ability to resist you.

Take away his armor is one way to say that. Bind him is another way to say that. It's not literal, but it is an image that Jesus uses.

He is saying, I have bound Satan, and that is why you see me plundering his house. I have taken away his armor. Now some people say, well, how could you possibly say that Satan is bound today? Well, we might just ask Jesus, how could Jesus say that he had bound Satan? Jesus was

saying that Satan was bound in his day.

And yet, Satan was not literally bound. Satan was still active. Later, he inhabited Judas and others.

Jesus still cast out more demons after this. The devil was still active in the world. So why did Jesus say he was bound? Well, binding him simply means something about one aspect.

There's a teaching he's giving here. He's saying that he is able to plunder Satan's house. That means Satan cannot resist him.

Satan has been disempowered. He's been incapacitated. Satan is in a condition that is analogous to a man being tied up.

When somebody's taking his stuff, he can't resist. He's overwhelmed. And although Satan is not literally sitting in a dungeon somewhere with shackles on him, Jesus sees his own victory over Satan as suitably likened to binding a strong man.

If it is suitably likened to binding a strong man in Jesus' teaching, why would it not be suitably likened to what Jesus did in John's vision? Why would it be strange for John to say the same thing Jesus said, only to say it in a graphic vision, where instead of talking about binding a strong man, he's talking about a dragon with a chain and a pit and a lid and all that stuff. It has to do with interfering with Satan's career of deceiving the nations. He's bound so he cannot deceive the nations as before.

Well, what do we know about Satan's career before Jesus came? All the nations were in his lap. No divine revelation had come to them. They were all in the dark.

They all worshipped demons. Most of them sacrificed their own children to demons. The world was in darkness.

The only nation that had any light of a significant amount was Israel, and even they succumbed often. But outside of Israel, it was darkness. Satan had an unchallenged monopoly on the nations.

He had them totally deceived in false religions. What happened when Jesus came? He said to his disciples, Hey, we're going to break out of the borders here of Israel. I want you to go to all the nations and make disciples there, because all authority in heaven and earth belongs to me now, and they need to know it.

They need to be brought under me. You need to go and teach them to observe everything I've commanded, because I'm the Lord of everything, and you go to the nations and make disciples out of them. In other words, Jesus sent his army to invade the realm where Satan had never been challenged before.

And although Satan still, of course, you don't want to take the imagery of Revelation in some

kind of absolute literal sense. I mean, you might, but I don't. I don't think it's right.

What it's saying is that Satan has been hindered in the same way that a strong man is bound. Satan cannot resist. Satan cannot stop the church from bringing the truth.

Satan cannot have the monopoly on the nations to deceive them anymore. The truth is coming to the nations, and has been coming to the nations now for 2,000 years, and Satan cannot stop it. Satan cannot successfully resist it.

He might as well be in a pit with a chain on, as far as his ability to resist is concerned. And it's the same kind of imagery Jesus used. And if Jesus used it, then John could use it.

Or we could say the Holy Spirit, who gave him these visions, could use it. And therefore, the binding of Satan is said to be something elsewhere in Scripture. It's said to be what Jesus did at his first coming.

In Colossians 2, Paul says, in Colossians 2.15, Paul says that Christ disarmed the principalities and powers. That's the demonic forces, Satan's forces. Christ disarmed them.

Remember, taking away the strong man's armor, in which he trusted, and plundering his house? That's what Jesus has done. He has disarmed the principalities and powers, made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them, in it, or some manuscripts say in him, but it's referring to what Jesus accomplished when he was here the first time. He disarmed the demonic world.

He took away the strong man's armor, in which he trusted. And he's been plundering his house ever since, through the gospel, through the church. Now, in Hebrews 2, verse 14, it says, Inasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he, Christ himself, also shared in the same.

That is, he became a human. He partook in flesh and blood, became man. So that, through death, that is Christ's death, his crucifixion, through death, he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Jesus destroyed the devil through his death. Now, the word destroy, what's that mean? There's different words in the Greek for destroy, and they don't all mean the same thing, but this word is the word katergaio, which means, if you look it up in electron, katergaio means to reduce to inactivity. The literal translation would be that Jesus, through his death, reduced him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, to inactivity.

This is imagery similar to binding. If you bind someone, you kind of reduce them to inactivity, don't you? In other words, through death, Jesus reduced Satan's activities in a huge degree, but not all his activities. Satan's not literally in a pit somewhere with a chain.

That's figurative. He's still busy in the world doing many things. In fact, he's deceiving those

who will allow themselves to remain deceived, but he has no monopoly over the nations.

He can't deceive the nations en masse anymore because Christ is informing and enlightening the nations en masse. The nations are coming over to Christ's side because they're seeing the light. Those who sat in darkness have seen a great light, it says, referring to Christ's ministry.

So, the binding of Satan is simply telling us, in Revelation 20, of a remarkable change that occurred because of Christ's coming here. Now, what about the thousand years themselves in Revelation 20, verses 4 through 6? I saw thrones and they who sat on them. Judgment was committed to them, and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not compromised with the beast, and so forth.

And it says at the end of that, they lived and reigned for a thousand years. Now, many translations, the last line of verse 4 says, they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The Greek word in the particular tense that is translated here, lived, is either a constantive aorist or an aggressive aorist.

Now, you don't know what those words mean, and I barely know what they mean. But I did study this out because there is a difference in translations. The aggressive and the constantive aorists have slightly different meanings, although they look the same.

The aorist looks the same, but its import is different in different cases. The word here, esadzo, I think it is. It's the form of living in the aorist.

It can be translated lived. As it is here. Meaning, lived on, continued to live.

That's the constantive aorist. If it's the constantive, it means they're constantly living. They're living on.

The same word in the aorist, the same form, can be translated aggressive aorist, which would mean came to life. They began to live. You would not have the word any different in the Greek to say either of those two things.

It either is they lived on, constantly, or they came to life. Many new translations, especially the ones translated by pre-millennialists, translated they came to life and reigned for a thousand years, thus suggesting, of course, resurrection. The righteous are resurrected, of course, at the coming of Christ.

To say they came to life and reigned for a thousand years places the thousand years after the second coming of Christ, after these people rise from the dead. They came to life, suggests resurrection. The pre-millennial versions, of which most modern translations are, they translated they came to life.

The King James and the New King James were translated by amillennialists. Therefore, they translated lived. The question is, which way is the correct way? This same word in the same

tense, exactly the same, is found two other times in Revelation.

I have to say that I don't have them at my fingertips, but one of them is a reference to Christ, which says he died and lived. It can be translated he died and came to life, speaking of his resurrection, or it can say he died and he nonetheless continues to live today, though he died. In that instance, when it speaks of Christ, it sounds like it's talking about resurrection.

He died and then, et sadzo, either lived or came to life. Came to life sounds like a better translation in that instance. However, the other occurrence is when it talks about the beast, which says he had a mortal head wound, but he, et sadzo, he had a mortal head wound, but he came to life, or he had a mortal head wound, or he lived on.

In this case, of course, he lived on. The beast never died. He had seven heads.

One of them was wounded mortally. Six of them were still in good health. He suffered a serious wound, but he did not die.

He suffered a head wound, but he lived. Et sadzo, then, in one case, when talking about Christ, seems to be talking about his resurrection. In the case of the beast, the same word seems to talk about his simply continuing to live.

That means it could be translated either way in this third instance in Revelation 20. This is the third time that word appears. It's used one way in one of the previous cases and the other way in the other, which makes it a toss-up.

Is this one lived or came to life? If you're premillennial, then came to life works, kind of. If you're not premillennial, you could say they lived on. These are people who died.

It says they were martyred for Christ. They were beheaded, but he saw them living on. Not on earth, certainly.

He saw the souls of them. This was not on earth. If this, in fact, was the resurrection, he would not see their souls.

He would see their resurrected bodies. Therefore, to say they came to life and reigned with him for a thousand years, when in fact it's their souls he's seen, that's a strange way to speak about life in heaven. Disembodied is coming to life.

They were already alive before they died. He that believes in Jesus has eternal life and will not come into condemnation. He has already passed from death to life.

They already were alive before they died and they lived on after they died. In other words, their death did not end their life. I saw them, he says.

I saw their souls enthroned. They were ruling for a thousand years with Christ and they lived on. Now, by the way, the word reigned is also in the same aorist tense and it can also be

ingressive or constantive, but what would it sound like if it was they came to life and started to reign for a thousand years? Or what about they lived and reigned for a thousand years? It seems like it's describing a continuous living and reigning, not simply beginning to live and reign.

It's for a thousand years that this happens. The thousand years means the whole church age. Those who die in Christ continue to live through the remainder of the church age, through the whole thousand year period.

Now, everybody else who dies doesn't. It says the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were over. This is the first resurrection.

So, when Christians die, they live on. When non-Christians die, they don't. And they won't live again until the end of time when the resurrection occurs.

That's what we're told in verse 5. Now, it says this is the first resurrection. And this is where I think this is the very strongest point for the pre-millennials because it sounds like it suggests there's two resurrections, this one and the one at the end of the thousand years. This one is clearly talking about saved people.

So, it must be the resurrection of the righteous. Whereas, at the end, it must be just the resurrection of the lost. And therefore, we have two resurrections with a millennium sandwiched in between them.

But as we saw, Jesus and Paul knew of no two resurrections, only one, that involved the wicked and the righteous. So, what could possibly be meant by the first resurrection? By the way, this passage, Revelation 20, verses 5 and 6, are perhaps the only places in the Bible that speak of a first resurrection or any kind of distinction of resurrection of one from another. So, it's this verse alone we have to explain.

The rest of the scripture always speaks of one resurrection. That includes everybody. What can we do with this phrase? Back to John.

John wrote Revelation. He also wrote the Gospel of John. Might as well let him explain himself.

Or rather, let Jesus explain himself in John's record. In John 5, again, remember we saw in verse 28, Jesus' reference to the physical resurrection at the end of time. He said, Do not marvel at this.

John 5, 28. For the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth. Some who have done good to the resurrection of life, those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.

That's the physical resurrection. He said, The hour is coming. That's a future thing, going to happen.

But look at verse 25. Jesus says in verse 25, We saw in verse 28, the hour is coming. But here, in verse 25, the hour is coming and now is.

That means there's a sense of futureness about this statement. And a sense in which it's presently true. What is presently true and futurely true? Dead people hear the voice of the Son of God and live.

Well, we don't have to guess what the future part is, the hour that is coming. He tells us that in plain terms in verse 28. The hour is coming when those who are in the graves, dead bodies in the graves will come forth.

They'll hear the voice of the Son of Man come forth. That's the resurrection. But what is the sense in which now is dead people hearing the voice of the Son of God and living? He answers that as well in verse 24.

This has already happened for some people. Who? The people who believe in Him. They have passed from death into life.

Spiritually, of course. The hour is coming when their bodies will pass from death into life. Their bodies will come out of the graves and live.

But in the meantime, they are spiritually passing from death into life. They're born again, in other words. The first resurrection, according to John's gospel, is when you're born again.

The second is that which happens at the end of the age, which is the physical resurrection of everybody. When John speaks in chapter 20 of Revelation of the first resurrection, he's talking about those who are born again. Being born again is the first resurrection.

The church age, the thousand years, is the time of people being born again, which is a spiritual resurrection. The physical resurrection will not occur until Jesus comes back at the end of this period of time. The people who are not saved won't live again until then.

They'll come out of their graves then. But we continue to live even after we die. We reign with Christ.

The dead, as well as the living in Christ, are alive and reigning with Him during this thousand years. He says in verse 6, Blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection. Over such, the second death has no power.

Now, the second death, we have not been told about yet. But we're told in chapter 20 in verse 14 that the lake of fire is the second death. So, you've got two deaths and two resurrections.

One death is, of course, physical death. The other is the second death, which we don't know what the nature of that is. We might call that spiritual death.

Maybe. I don't know. But it's not natural death.

It's another death. Natural death is the first death. The lake of fire is the second death.

We have two deaths. There's also two resurrections. One is the physical, natural resurrection.

The other is another kind of resurrection. Just as the second death is a different kind of death than natural death. So, the first resurrection is a different kind of resurrection than physical resurrection.

There are two, a physical and a spiritual. And John has made that clear in John chapter 5. Actually, Jesus made that clear in his teaching. So, we have Satan bound during the present age from certain activity of deceiving the nations.

Not entirely. The language is extreme. It sounds like he's shut up and absolutely, you know, incapacitated.

Not active at all. But we should be aware of making too much literalness of the visions in Revelation. The idea is the same here as it is in the teaching of Jesus and Paul in the book of Hebrews about what Jesus accomplished against Satan when he was here the first time.

But then in verse 7, And then we have, of course, the events associated with the second coming of Christ. Now, this little while at the end, I presume, has not begun yet. I believe this is probably a future thing.

And we saw in chapter 11 a similar dichotomy between the vast majority of the church age, on one hand, and a little while at the end where the church seems to be defeated or at least is not on the offensive anymore. We saw that in chapter 11 where the two witnesses representing the church had a lengthy period of ministry followed by a very short period of incapacitation. They were three years ministry, three and a half days dead is the imagery that was used.

But the imagery is the same here. This time, the longer period is not three and a half years. It's likened to a thousand years.

The shorter period is not three and a half days, but it's an undesignated length of time. But both visions, chapter 11 and chapter 20, give us the same eschatology. For the most part, the church age is characterized by the church moving forward to the nations, taking the gospel to the nations, obstructing the devil's ability, inhibiting the devil's ability to deceive the nations by bringing truth and light to the nations.

But that, apparently, is a circumstance that will be reversed briefly at the end. And that little brief period at the end is what will be interrupted by the coming of Christ. Now, the symbolism is too great for us to be very specific about what this will look like, but we can say that he's released in the sense that he was previously free to deceive the nations.

It sounds like after the gospel has been preached to the nations, the devil will have one last chance to try to deceive who he can. And the church will be perhaps under persecution,

perhaps driven underground. The picture is of being besieged.

The beloved city, this is not in one location, the church is worldwide, so this is a worldwide siege of the church. Perhaps political, perhaps, who knows. I mean, some kind of restricting of the church's activities globally.

There have been, of course, local and national persecutions of the church over a period of time throughout history, but there's never been a time where the entire church worldwide has been besieged by a devil who's at large again with many of the same liberties that he had before Jesus even came. The nations, masses of them, symbolically referred to as Gog and Magog to reminisce about Ezekiel 38 and 39, they will come against the beloved city. The beloved city in Revelation is the church.

We will see that if we have not been convinced of it yet. We will see it in the description of the beloved city in the next chapter. And so it is the church besieged by the nations of the world.

What this will look like in actual events, I do not know, but it may not be far off. Certainly severe persecution of the church, driving the church underground so that it does not have a visible witness above ground because it's basically fighting for its life, for its survival. This has happened in some countries.

It has never yet happened to the whole church, and it sounds like that's what is described here. And so it may be that we should expect, maybe in our lifetimes, maybe later, sometime in the future, at the end of the thousand years, so to speak, Satan will again get a chance to do some serious harm and threaten in a big way the church. God has always intended for his people to undergo testing because what we're being trained for is so magnificent.

The responsibilities we will have in reigning with Christ are so demanding in a sense of our loyalty and of our character that there are severe tests being offered in this lifetime, and one will test the whole final generation of the church, apparently. Now, a little while. How long is a little while? I wish I knew.

Back when I first became an amillennialist, I still believed in a future seven-year tribulation. So my view was that it'll be the seven-year tribulation that'll be this little while that the devil's loosed again, or at least during the period that the Antichrist reigns. I no longer believe that the Bible has anything to say about a seven-year tribulation, but that doesn't mean there isn't some kind of tribulation or some kind of trouble.

It's not the tribulation Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24 or even the one that Revelation talks about in chapter 7, verse 14, as far as I'm concerned. But it is nonetheless a tribulation. Paul said, when I was with you, he told the Thessalonians in chapter 3 of 1 Thessalonians, he said, when I was with you, I told you we would suffer tribulation.

And Jesus said in John 16, 33, in the world you will have tribulation. And so we shall. And of course the church has throughout its history in certain places.

You and I haven't, not yet. But the church will, apparently. That seems to be what is described here.

How long will it last? We may hope it is very, very short. But we're not told. It's just as inexact as the thousand years is in its prediction.

I would like to think it'd only be a few weeks or months. It seems probably more likely it'd be a few years. But it might be a very long time.

I had a friend, a Baptist minister, an old man who was an amillennialist. I didn't know he was. Because I didn't know what amillennialism was.

But he used to say, I think Satan has been loosed. I wasn't quite sure how his eschatology was playing out there. Because I only knew of dispensationalism.

But I realize now, since I became amillennial, oh, I know what he's talking about. The little season at the end. He thinks it's now.

And he thought it had begun in the middle 1800s. His evidence was that before the middle 1800s, there was no technology whatsoever except basic animal power, man power, wind power, water power. Basically, if man wanted to do any work, he had his own muscles, his animal's muscles, or any way he might be able to harvest the wind or running water, and he could do some work.

But in the 1800s, we began to have steam power. And beyond that, it rapidly progressed. We have now internal combustion engines.

Then we had jet engines. And then we have flying machines. And we have then atomic power and all this kind of stuff.

And so it's like all of a sudden, after 6,000 years of man having nothing but animal power and his own strength, nothing changed for humanity for 6,000 years in this respect. And then suddenly, you know, 150 years ago, suddenly everything changes, and it changes like gangbusters. And now we can go to the moon, and we can fly around the world, and they say now we'll be able to fly to England from New York in an hour and things like that by the new jets.

You know, wow, how quickly things have changed. And my friend, whose name is Fred Bopp, he's now deceased, he thought that that all happened because Satan was loosed and this technology was Satan's way of trying to bring the human race to its ultimate self-destruction. Interesting theory.

But when I heard his theory, I thought, well, you know, something else happened in the middle 1800s too. The church began to be invaded by a lot of cults. The Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian science, they all popped up in the mid-1980s.

So did communism, Marxism. So did Freudianism. So did evolution, came up at that time.

So did dispensationalism, interestingly enough. But the point is, many philosophies that were a deception to the Christian world, to the church, which had never held sway, suddenly popped up like dandelions in a meadow in this period of time. So I thought, well, this guy might have something.

I don't know. I'm not sure. I'm inclined to think not, but I'm also inclined to consider maybe.

150 years is a little while compared to 1,000 years or 2,000 years. And so the little while might be longer than a few years, but on the other hand, I believe that it is mainly characterized by events much more challenging to the church than we have experienced yet because the church still is going out and winning nations. China, Korea, many parts of Africa and South America are just turning to Christ by the millions.

And therefore, I think Satan is still, in the sense that Revelation 20 talks about, probably still bound. And I believe that the besieging of the beloved city must speak of circumstances more restrictive to the church than we have at this present time. And when that happens, well, it looks like it'll be a rough time, but not for good because the church is never conquered, really.

It seems to be, but fire from heaven comes down. And Paul says it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you and to give you rest with us when the Lord shall come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that do not know God and don't obey the gospel. That, I believe, is the explanation of Revelation 20 from the rest of Scripture, which is what, of course, we need if we're going to understand anything in Revelation.

And so we take our break, somewhat belatedly.

OpenTheo

Revelation 21 - 22

Revelation - Steve Gregg

In this text, Steve Gregg discusses Revelation 21-22 and the idea of a new heaven and earth. Gregg notes that the descent of the New Jerusalem and the descent of the Lamb's wife are likely connected to the meeting of the church and Christ at his second coming. The city is depicted as having twelve foundations, each associated with one of the twelve apostles, and it calls to mind the Holy Holies, God's dwelling place among men. Gregg also touches on the idea of renewal and the removal of impurities, as well as the importance of righteous and holy living.

Transcript

In Revelation chapter 21, we are introduced to a new heavens and a new earth and a new Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem, as we shall see, is the church. There are two very different views as to this section in that some believe it is the church at the present time.

That is, they believe that it is a description of the new covenant ever since the fall of Jerusalem, or maybe ever since Jesus established the new covenant in the upper room. In other words, they see this as simply another figurative depiction of the age of the church in which we live. Probably a more common view is to see it as the church eschatologically after Jesus comes back.

The church resurrected, the church glorified, and living in a new creation, a new heavens and new earth. Now, there are arguments to go both ways. It may surprise you that in this case I am going to side with the futurist view.

It may seem like I am always going with the fulfilled view, but there are reasons, a great number of reasons, why I believe we are looking at the eschatological church in the end times after Jesus comes back in the new heavens and new earth. I will give my reasons, but first we need to read the material so that we will know the data that we are going to derive our opinions from. You will remember in chapter 20 and verse 11 a verse that I associated with the second coming of Christ in my commentary on it.

It says, Then I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. So the end of the heavens and

the earth seem to be associated with the second coming of Christ as Peter said in 2 Peter 3 verses 10-13. And having seen the heavens and earth flee away, we now see in chapter 21 verse 1, I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then he who sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.

And he said to me, Write, for these words are true and faithful. And he said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven last bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the Spirit into a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. And her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates and twelve angels at the gates, and the names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. Three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its walls. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed twelve thousand furlongs, its length and breadth and height are equal.

It's a cube. Then he measured its wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. Let's be clear about that.

The man was not a man, he was an angel. And the construction of its wall was of jasper, and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones.

The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chasildony, I don't know if I

pronounced that right, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, and the eleventh jacinth, or jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. Some of these stones I'm not familiar with their pronunciation. I haven't dealt much with gems in my life.

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls. Each individual gate was of one pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

And the city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. And the Lamb is its light, and the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day, and there shall be no night there, and they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it.

But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. Now the description continues into chapter 22, and we will take it up to verse 5 without first commenting. And he showed me a pure river of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there was no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.

And there shall be no night there, they shall need no lamp, nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light, and they shall reign forever and ever. Now the rest of this, I believe, is sort of an epilogue to the book, and so the vision pretty much seems to end here. The description of the holy city is its primary interest, although it is part of a new heaven and a new earth.

Now, I'd point out to you that this is not heaven, although I suppose it could be symbolic for heaven, but there's no reason to see it as symbolic for heaven. Many people think that the eternal home of the saints is in heaven. This is simply a manner of speaking that Christians use.

Of course, heaven is not where we will live. We will live on the new earth. The new Jerusalem, which is the habitation of the saints and of God and of the Lamb, comes down from heaven.

We see a new heaven, a new earth, and from heaven coming down is the new Jerusalem. Presumably, it doesn't say it in so many words, but presumably it lands on the earth. There's a heaven, there's an earth, it's coming down from heaven, presumably it's to the earth.

And the reason I emphasize that is because there are a number of Christian teachers of a dispensational sort that I've heard who seem to think that the new Jerusalem doesn't ever land

on the earth, that it's actually kind of in the sky between heaven and earth. There's certainly nothing in the passage to suggest anything like this, but that's how they picture it. In fact, my former pastor taught that it's sort of like a satellite going around the new earth and its size, which works out to about 1,500 miles cubed, he said its size is not really that different than the size of the moon.

And so it's kind of like the moon orbiting the earth. And I think he suggested that people will transport from the mothership to earth and so forth. He didn't use the term the mothership, but it kind of conveys an idea like that.

Maybe it's like a space station. Now, I cannot for the life of me imagine where teachers have gotten that idea, but I've heard others say it too, that the new Jerusalem is hovering somewhere. The description is the Jerusalem coming down from heaven.

Of course, it doesn't say how far it comes down, but without being told otherwise, we would assume it's coming down to the earth, which is contrasted with heaven in the vision. There's a new creation here and the new Jerusalem, the church comes down from heaven and it comes to the earth. And this is where we live.

Why should I think that? Well, Jesus said so in the Beatitudes, he said, bless her, the meek, they shall inherit the earth. That's what we will do. We'll inherit the earth, not heaven earth.

Now I do believe that if you died today and you're a Christian, your soul will go to heaven. That's my belief. There's many different beliefs about that.

Mine is that your immaterial self will go to be with the Lord in heaven, but only as long as he is there. When he comes here, you'll come with him. The church comes down from heaven at the second coming of Christ.

It comes down where he comes down to the earth. He's going to inherit the earth and you're going to inherit the earth with him. We need to remember that Adam and Eve, before they fell, were placed in the circumstances which they would have remained in forever had they not sinned.

In other words, the perfect earth as the habitation for perfect people was plan A for God. That was interrupted by the fall. The earth was corrupted and people were corrupted and the history since that time has been corrupted.

But Paul says that the whole of creation, which has been groaning since that time, will itself be delivered from the bondage of decay. It'll be delivered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God at the redemption of our bodies, the resurrection. The earth will be delivered from its fallen condition apparently.

If that is true, then we would have every reason to believe that God has restored what was lost in paradise. His original intention was for men to populate a perfect earth. Death interrupted

because of sin.

When death is dealt with and death is abolished and the earth is cleansed, then plan A can continue and living on a perfect earth is what is described here. Of course, the language is symbolic, but the question is to what degree is it symbolic and to what degree is it not? It is possible to see the new covenant as the new heavens and the new earth, the environment that the church lives in. The church, the New Jerusalem lives in the new covenant and the new covenant could be seen as a new creation.

The arguments for this come from Isaiah, which is where we first learn our first read of a new heavens, a new earth. In Isaiah chapter 65 and verse 17, Isaiah 65 17, it says, Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth for the former shall not be remembered nor come to mind. Well, that certainly sounds like Revelation 21.

However, if you read the context of Isaiah 65, which actually we have done in the past few weeks, we've studied Isaiah together, I believe we will find that the best understanding of the new heavens, new earth in Isaiah is a reference to the new covenant replacing the old covenant and referring to the passing of the old order when Jerusalem is destroyed in the old covenant is abolished and the introduction of a new order. It's like a totally new creation. Why? Why do I think such a thing? Well, mainly from the context of the statement in Isaiah, but also confirmation from Paul in 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 17.

This is 2nd Corinthians 5 17. Paul said, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Then he goes on and says, old things have passed away.

Behold, all things have become new. Now to say old things have passed away is to say what Revelation 21 forces, the former things have passed away. That's how Revelation 21, four closes.

The former things have passed away. And then the next verse five says, he says, behold, I make all things new. So former things have passed away and all things have become new.

That's what Paul says is in the life of the believer today. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. We could say he's in the new heavens and new earth and former things have passed away.

All things become new. Paul is not talking eschatology. He's talking about present here.

Therefore, there is certainly an argument to be made for this new heavens, new earth and new Jerusalem to be talking about the present time. Likewise, the new Jerusalem is identified as the church in other places in scripture. As for example, in Galatians chapter four, where Paul is making a contrast to the Jerusalem, which is on earth, which is earthly Jerusalem and what he calls the Jerusalem, which is above.

In Galatians four, 26, Paul said the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. It's the

mother church of us all. We're all children of God.

He's our father and the church is our mother. And it is the Jerusalem, which is above. We've also seen on other occasions, what is said in Hebrews chapter 12 about the heavenly Jerusalem.

Hebrews chapter 12, verse 22, the writer says to the Christians, you have come. This is already, we have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Certainly this is the same as what Paul in Galatians four called the Jerusalem that is above.

It's the heavenly Jerusalem. In Revelation 21, that Jerusalem is seen coming down from heaven, but in the church age, it is a heavenly city. And he says in verse 23, that this is the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are written in heaven.

So we already have other books prior to revelation telling us that the church is the heavenly Jerusalem. And even if neither Paul nor the writer of Hebrews had told us such things, we could have deduced it from what we are told about it here in revelation chapter 21. For example, it is clearly said to be the lamb's wife in revelation.

The lamb is Jesus and Jesus's wife is the church. And we see in chapter 21, verse nine, at the end of verse nine, the guy says, one of the seven angels says, come, I will show you the bride, the lamb's wife. Okay.

So the lamb's wife, we're going to see the church. And he says, he carried me away in the spirit, verse 10 and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God. So the descent of the new Jerusalem is the descent of the lamb's wife, probably like coming down the aisle to meet her husband at, I say the second coming of Christ.

We'll, we'll see why shortly. There's another view. Another thing that would tell us that it's the church is verse 14, which says now the wall of the city had 12 foundations and on them were the names of the 12 apostles of the lamb.

Well, it's got 12 foundations. They are identified with the apostles. Paul said in Ephesians chapter two and verses 20 and 21, the last two verses, not, not, not exactly, not quite the last two verses 20 and 21 and 22.

For that matter, the last three verses of Ephesians two, Paul says that the church has been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone in whom the whole building being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God through the spirit in revelation 21, we read the tabernacle of God is with men in 21 three. And so God dwells with his people in the people. We are being built into a habitation of God.

The foundation we're built on is the apostles and prophets. The city is depicted as having 12 foundation stones, each associated with one of the 12 apostles. Also the city is likened to the holy of holies in the temple.

Now we encountered the holy of holies back in chapter 11 of revelation versus one and two, our Bible's translated the temple, but the Greek word is the holy of holies. It's translated as temple apparently wrongly chapter 11 versus one and two, as I understood them, refer to the church as the holy of holies being preserved while the outer temple structure is destroyed in 80, 70, the church, the spiritual temple survives. The church is the spiritual holy of holies in the sense that that's where God meets with people.

And we're not here at the church building. We're talking about the community of Christ. We're talking about the people of God.

We are the living stones. Peter said in first Peter two, five living stones built into a holy temple or a house, and it's the house of God. It's the habitation of God, but we are the living stones that are built up in this way.

We are therefore the habitation of God. We are the place where God lives and meets with his people, the house of God. Paul said to Timothy in first Timothy three, I think it's verse 15.

He says that if I'm delayed, you may know how to behave or conduct yourself in the house of God, which he said is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. So the house of God, the habitation of God, the tabernacle of God with men is the church. And it is like the holy of holies.

And this city is described symbolically that way, that it's cube shaped. The holy of holies was cube shaped in the tabernacle. The holy of holies was a cube 15 feet by 15 feet by 15 feet.

As it turns out, if you translate the dimensions of the city into our measurements, this city is 1500 miles by 1500 miles by 1500 miles, a very huge holy of holies by comparison. And so it is cube shaped. And like the holy of holies, it has no source of light except the glory of God in the tabernacle.

There was the outer court that had the sun and moon to lighten it. There was the, uh, holy place which had the lamp stand to lighten it. But in the holy of holies, there were no windows and no lamps, nothing to give it light and a thick veil covering the entrance so that it was completely dark unless God showed up.

And it was the glory of God that illuminated the holy of holies. Likewise, here in the city, we read in verse 23, the city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it for the glory of God illuminated it and the lamb was its light. Likewise, in verse five of chapter 22, revelation 22, five, there should be no night there.

They need no lamp nor light of the sun. See the outer court of the temple had the light of the sun, the holy place, the tabernacle had the lamp, but the holy of holies had neither the sun nor the lamp. Likewise, the holy city, like the holy of holies, doesn't have a lamp or sunlight for the Lord gives them light.

So the imagery we've been looking at calls to mind the holy of holies, the dwelling place of God among men. It's a huge holy of holies. The original one could only have one man in it at a time.

That's why I don't know how to be 15 by 15 by 15 feet, but a holy of holies that includes millions of people has got to be much larger. The church is not literally cubed shaped. Of course, it's not any shape.

It's made of people. It's not really a building. It's not really a city.

This is the imagery of the church, but it's like the holy of holies, which of course the church is also. It's the new creation. As I said, Paul said, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation.

And in chapter 21, verse one, it says that I saw new heavens, new earth, old things are passed away. So the new Jerusalem is the church. But the question now is, is it the church now or the church after Jesus comes back? There is one other set of data I should probably bring up before we explore that question, that controversy.

And that is, it's another way of associating with the church. The number 12 in scripture is associated with the people of God. The old Testament people were divided into 12 tribes, descended from the 12 patriarchs, the sons of Jacob.

The church was founded upon 12 leaders, also the 12 apostles. And therefore 12 and multiples of 12, just as the number seven has its symbolic meaning, so 12 does. It symbolizes the people of God.

We saw earlier in chapter four, there were 24 elders, which I suggested represents the people of God of all time, old and new Testament people of God, 24 elders. Here, there's quite a few 12s and multiples of 12. We've got in verse 12, of all things, chapter 21, 12 mentions the 12 gates of the city associated with the 12 tribes of Israel.

In verse 14, we have the 12 foundations associated with the 12 apostles. The measurements of the city in verse 16 are 12,000 furlongs. This is why it says 1,500 miles, but 12,000 furlongs.

That's obviously a multiple of 12, 12,000. And the wall is measured at 144 cubits. We know that 144 is 12 times 12, another multiple of 12.

That's in chapter 21, verse 17. When you come to chapter 22, verse two, and we find that there's the tree of life and it has 12 kinds of fruit and it produces fruit each month. That means 12 times a year.

So the 12 numbers are just written through this whole section, which speaks of the people of God. This city is the church, the people of God, and all these 12s suggest that. Built on the foundation of the apostles, the heavenly Jerusalem, the Lamb's wife, all of this points to the church.

Now, I said that I believe it's the church at the coming of Christ and not the church at the

present time. I pointed out that in Isaiah 65, where we first hear of the new heavens, new earth, I believe Isaiah is talking about the present time. I believe he's talking about the new covenant era replacing the old covenant era.

So it might seem inconsistent for me to say, this is not talking about the present time, but there's reasons for it. I'll tell you the reasons. One of them is that in Hebrews chapter six, there's a description of Christians who actually were Christians, but fell away.

But describing them during their Christian time, it describes them in verse five, as people who have tasted of the good word of God and of the powers of the age to come. Christians are those who've tasted of the word of God and have already tasted of the powers of the age to come. Jesus is the first born of the new creation.

He came to life. We have not yet, not physically. We will rise from the dead too into this new creation, I believe.

However, when we're born again, we already tasted the powers of that resurrection, of that new creation. We're resurrected in Christ and we experienced the spirit of God renewing us through regeneration. And this makes us a new creation.

So that in a sense, though there is a physical resurrection, there is also prior to that, a spiritual one. The physical resurrection, I believe, brings us into a physical new heaven and new earth. The spiritual resurrection into the spiritual enjoyment of the powers of that future age.

We receive eternal life now, not later. We find the renewing work of the Holy Spirit now, not later. There is a new covenant now, not later.

The powers of the age to come have already invaded the present age. And in that sense, the spiritual aspects of the new heavens, new earth are already being tasted and experienced by the church who comes into Christ. There is a not yet and a now, an already aspect of this.

I believe that Isaiah 65 is talking about the already. I believe that when Paul says, if any man's in Christ, he's a new creation, he's talking about the already part. That's already true.

I believe that Revelation 21 is talking about the not yet part. Now why? Well, there are evidences within the chapter, but there's also, of course, the cross-reference to Peter's words that we saw last time in 2 Peter chapter 3. In 2 Peter chapter 3, Peter says in verse 10, but the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise. The elements will melt with a fervent heat, both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

And then in verse 13, nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Now, one thing I would point out is that if the new heaven, new earth is merely in Peter's mind, the new covenant, we don't have to look forward to that. Peter was living near the end of his life.

He had been spending most of his life already in the new heaven, new earth in that sense. He had already been a new creation from the time of Pentecost. He would not be anticipating that.

That's old news, but he's anticipating something future, a day of the Lord that had not yet come. Now, full preterists believe that that was the destruction of Jerusalem and the new heavens, new earth essentially begins with the destruction of the new Jerusalem. And although, you know, there was a sense in which the new covenant stood alone after that point, if we're talking about what we are looking forward to, Peter had no more reason to look forward to his own spiritual experience after the fall of Jerusalem than the spiritual experience he was already enjoying.

Peter did not live, in fact, until the fall of Jerusalem. He died before that at the hands of Nero, but had he lived beyond it, it would have been no change in his spiritual life than what it was already. There was not some new experience of the new covenant that Christians had in that transition between the before and after fall of Jerusalem.

No significant change occurred. Peter is not talking about the destruction of or the passing of the old covenant. He's talking about the passing of the heavens and the earth.

And in the context, it seems obvious because he compares it with the flood, which was a natural judgment of the natural planet. And in the earlier verses, he's saying there are people who don't think Jesus is going to come back and destroy the world. And they think, well, it's been a long time.

Nothing has changed because they don't realize that God did this once before in the flood. And that was the old earth. But he said the heavens and earth that now are, that is since the flood, are being reserved, he says in verse seven, for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Now, some may make this 70 AD. I do not. 70 AD was not the counterpart of the flood.

The flood didn't wipe out one city. It wiped out the human population of the earth. It's a global judgment.

And to say, well, God's going to wipe out Jerusalem someday is not a point that's enhanced or diminished by any reference to the flood. But to say God's going to wipe out the whole world someday, there is a correspondence with the flood there. It was water, then it'll be fire next time.

And we are looking for the coming of Christ when, in fact, he will dissolve the heavens earth and there will be a new heaven earth. Peter's talking about the not yet part. Okay.

Now in revelation itself, I believe there are strong evidences that this is the eschatological church after Jesus comes back, not the church in its present phase at this time. Let me give you my reasons. First of all, though not in order of appearance, in the chapter, in verse 11, he sees

the holy Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.

This is the church glorified. Now the apostles spoke about the glorification of the church or the glorification of the Christians as a future event to occur when Jesus returns. In Romans chapter 8, in verses just prior to him talking about the change of the creation from its groaning condition to its new delivered condition, that is in a passage for Paul, it has the new heavens, new earth in mind.

In Romans chapter 8 and verse 17, he said, if we are children, then we're heirs, heirs of God is Romans 8, 17 and joint heirs with Christ. If indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together. The time is coming when we, the church will together be glorified.

Not now we're suffering. Now we're suffering with him. Now the time will come when we are glorified.

Verse 18, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time, I take to mean this lifetime, are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in us, which is not at this present time. There is a future time of glory. There is a present time of suffering.

And elsewhere in second Corinthians 4, 18, Paul says, I'm convinced that the sufferings of this present time, or no, he says that he says our light affliction, which is but for a moment works for us and exceeding eternal weight of glory. Now the glory is in the future. The suffering is in the present.

And anyone can see that simply by looking at the world right now, we are still suffering. The church is still suffering in exactly the same way that Paul and his first century Christians were suffering. The period of suffering is not over.

The period of glory has not yet appeared. In chapter, in Colossians chapter 3 and verse 4, Colossians 3, 4, it says when Christ, who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. So the church appearing in glory will occur when Jesus appears in glory.

When Jesus returns, then the church will be glorified. Revelation 21 is talking about the church having the glory of God. It is glorified.

And that shouldn't surprise us because it is a connection with the previous chapter. The second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the general judgment were all at the end of chapter 20, including the abolition of the old heavens and earth. And now we have the new.

This is chronologically and logically following chapter 20 and therefore following the second coming of Christ. It is not the church at this present time, but at a future time. In chapter 21, verse 4, it says there is no more of several things.

God will wipe away their tears from their eyes. There'll be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. And there shall not be any more pain.

Now, if someone wanted to apply this to the present, they might say, well, no more death because we've got eternal life now. So that's the present. No more sorrow because we rejoice in Jesus and we have the fruit of the spirit, which is joy and so forth.

But it gets harder and harder when you say there's no more crying and no more pain. In what sense can we say that Christianity has inaugurated a season with no pain or crying? Paul said he even weeps as he writes in Philippians about those who are the enemies of the cross. I weep while I'm writing.

John himself wept much when he first thought there was no one to break the seals. Weeping is part of this present age. Pain is certainly part of the present age.

That has not been abolished yet. That is something that we must anticipate in the future. Also, of course, those in the New Jerusalem here are contrasted with those who are in the lake of fire.

In verse 8, it says after it describes the New Jerusalem, it says, but the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, have their place in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone of the second death. That's eschatological. There are two groups of people.

There's the New Jerusalem and then there's the people in the lake of fire. No one's in the lake of fire yet. That follows the last judgment.

So this is the same time frame that others are in the lake of fire. This Jerusalem is glorified. The city is described as being of pure gold.

Chapter 21, verse 18. The construction of its wall was of jasper. The city was pure gold, clear like glass.

By the way, the streets in it were also pure gold, like transparent glass in verse 21. This gold has been purified all the way. There's no more impurities to remove.

You can see right through it. By the way, you can't get gold that pure as far as I know. No matter how pure you get the gold, you're not going to be able to see through it.

This is figurative. But the point is, it's like they used to sell some kind of shampoo or something that was just clear like water. And they say, see, there's no impurities in there.

You can see right through it. I guess so. But there are some impurities.

They're invisible. I don't know that the fact you could see right through that shampoo means there were no impurities. There could have been alcohol or all kinds of things in there that you could see through.

But the impression here is the gold is so purified. You can see right through it. There's no impurities left.

It's been totally removed of dross. Now of course, Peter said in First Peter chapter one and verse seven, verses six and seven. First Peter one, six and seven.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found unto praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. I take the revelation of Jesus Christ to be the second coming of Christ and all our sufferings, which are like the purification process of gold, removing dross, it will redound to purity of product and glory at the time of Christ. The glorification of the church is when it's perfectly purged, our purging process being over, no more fiery trials, no more removal of dross.

This is later, not now. We're still being refined, but the city is described as completely refined. That there's no more curse in chapter 22, verse three is very indicative because the curse that came on the earth through sin is still with us.

There is death, there is sorrow, there is pain still. There are still thorns and thistles and there are still pain and childbearing for women. The curse has not been removed yet as we speak.

Even though 70 AD came and went, all these things continue as they were until there is a new heaven's new earth without the curse that's and so described here. Here it says in verse 22, verse four, his servants shall see his face. We don't see his face now, but in first John chapter three, beginning in verse one, he says, beloved, now we are the sons of God.

Or actually it begins by saying, behold, what manner of love the father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. And he says, and now we are the sons of God, though it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.

When he appears, we'll see him face to face. We'll see him as he is. And that then we'll be like him.

That'll be the manifestation of the sons of God that Paul talked about in Romans eight. John says, we are already sons of God, but that hasn't been manifested yet. It does not yet appear that we are sons of God.

It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know when he appears, we will be like him. That'll be the manifestation of our status as sons of God for every eye to see. For we shall see him as he is.

That's future in revelation 22, for they see his face. We do not currently see his face. Likewise in chapter 22, verse five, they reign forever, not for the thousand years.

The thousand year reign is during the church age. This is a reign forever after Jesus returns. And so these factors, the city has the glory of God.

There's no crying, death or pain. There's a contrast of these people with those who are now in the lake of fire. The fact that the city is pure gold, completely refined, that there's no more curse, that God's people see him face to face and that they reign forever rather than for the thousand year period.

All of these point to an eschatological state of the church after Jesus comes back. It is no doubt very symbolic. All the twelves, this cube shape, all of that.

These are impressionistic to give us ideas of the likeness of this two different things. The Holy of Holies, for example. It may be that the city of God will look exactly like this when it materializes in its glory, but I have no reason to believe it because it's rather hard to really press these things.

How could a city be dressed like a bride? And that's what he sees. He says, he sees the new Jerusalem coming out of heaven dressed like a bride. Obviously, we are not literally a city with walls.

We're not literally a bride either. We're not literally dressed with a bride's gown. None of this is quite literal.

It's all giving theological information about the eventual glory of being the people of God with God in our midst after Jesus returns. The throne of God in our midst, he that sits on the throne and the lamb and the river of life poured out. There's a lot of imagery here from Ezekiel, the tree of life bearing its fruits.

We've had things to say about that in previous lectures. The limits of our time right now prevent us from going into those things again. Now, the last part of chapter 22, beginning at verse six.

Then he said to me, these words are faithful and true. And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show his servants the things which must shortly take place. Behold, I am coming quickly.

Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.

This is a replay of chapter 19, verse 10. Then he said to me, see that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant and of your brethren, the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book.

Worship God. And he said to me, do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book. For the time is at hand.

We've made much of this previously. We'll not go into it again. Obviously, a reference to a soon fulfillment, which makes it inappropriate to seal the book up for some later generation.

He who is unjust, let him be unjust still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still. He who is righteous, let him be righteous still.

He who is holy, let him be holy still. Now, being unjust and filthy are mentioned in contrast to being righteous and holy. And the statement, whoever is like that, let him still be like that.

This is not really giving people permission to be bad. What it seems to be saying is this, the time is upon us. The time is short.

It is so immediate that basically there's not time for people to change. Those who have chosen to be filthy up to this point, well, I guess they're going to have to stay that way. Those who are already repentant and holy, they'll stay that way.

The judgment is imminent, and essentially it's kind of too late for people to change, too late to repent. So, those who find themselves unjust and filthy, I guess you just have to let them stay that way. Verse 12, Behold, I am coming quickly.

And again, coming could refer to the second coming, but I think not. Certainly, he didn't come quickly in that sense, but the coming quickly is his coming in judgment on Jerusalem, I believe. Again, these verses are not describing chapters 21 and the first part of chapter 22.

This is not talking about the vision of the new heavens, new earth. This is talking about the book as a whole. As a whole, the book is about the fall of Jerusalem.

There are segments like chapters 10 through 13, which look a little beyond that or even a long ways beyond that. And chapters 20 through 21 do the same thing. But in general, the book is about one thing, and that is the judgment of Babylon, the judgment of Egypt, the judgment of Sodom, all of which are the judgment of Jerusalem.

And that's what he's talking about when he says, I'm coming quickly. My reward is with me to give to everyone according to his work. I'm Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

These titles were already used in the first chapter. Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates of the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters and whoever loves and practices a lie.

Some people think this is describing conditions on the new earth, that outside the city are all these sinners, but we've already passed from the description of the new heaven, new earth. These are concluding remarks and they pertain to the time that John is writing, that in the city today, in the body of Christ, are the righteous who keep his commandments. Outside are the immoral.

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the root and the

offspring of David. The root of David means the one from whom David sprang.

The offspring means the one who sprang from David. So here's an enigma. Jesus lives before David.

In fact, he's David's source because he's the source of all, but he's also the descendant of David. So in saying he's David's son, how is it that David calls him his Lord? Well, because he's more than David's son. He's also David's root.

He's David's God. He's David's creator. David sprang from him just as surely as he sprang from David.

And the spirit and the bride say, come, and let him who hears say, come, and let him who thirsts come, and whoever desires, let him take of the water of life freely. The same invitation Jesus gave in John chapter 7, verses 37 and 38. The water of life there in John 7, 39, is said to be the Holy Spirit.

So this is an offer the church and Christ, or I should say the spirit of Christ, and the church together are issuing this invitation to the readers. The church invites you to the wedding feast. The spirit invites you to come and drink of the water of life, the Holy Spirit, to enter into the taste of the powers of the age to come now.

This is what is being said. For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book.

And if anyone takes away from the words of this book, of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in the book. Now, this is a strong warning. This business about not adding to the book or taking away.

Many people think of this as a reference to the canon of scripture. That the book of Revelation being the last book says don't let anyone else add to this book. But it's clear that it's talking about the book of Revelation, not the collected writings of the Bible.

Because it says if you add to this book, the plagues of this book will be added to you. You do not find in the 66 books of scripture, most of them having anything to do with plagues at all. Exodus does.

A few chapters of Exodus have to do with plagues. And, of course, you have a plague mentioned in Zechariah 14. Then you have the plagues of the book of Revelation.

Well, it certainly seems like the plagues of this book are not referring to the canon of scripture, but the book itself. Besides, Revelation may not have been the last book written. It's very likely that the gospel of John was written after this.

So, this would not be putting some kind of a seal on the canon of scripture saying no more

books can be written, but rather don't change the book of Revelation. Don't add or take away from it or there are dire consequences for you. You can have your name removed from the book of life or the Alexandria text says from the tree of life.

Your part will be taken from the tree of life. But the point is you'll lose your salvation. Now, what is it that's being forbidden here then? It certainly doesn't mean don't have any more prophecies or any more books written because back in Deuteronomy, Moses said don't add to or take away from this law.

Yet, many books of the Bible were written after that. In Proverbs chapter 30 verses 5 and 6, it says every word of God is pure. He is a shield to those who put their trust in him.

Do not add to his words lest you be found a liar. Don't add to his words. It says in Proverbs 30, Solomon wrote that.

Most of the books of the Old Testament and the Bible were written after that. So don't add to his words doesn't mean don't write more books. It means, of course, don't alter with your own modifications what God has said.

Don't change by adding or subtracting to what he has said. It does not mean that we are not allowed to comment on it or to interpret it or to suggest meanings, but we're not supposed to change it. This might even be an exhortation to those who would copy it out.

If so, they didn't follow instructions very well because the manuscript evidence for Revelation is as bad as it can get. Between the different manuscripts of Revelation, there are so many copyist errors. Somebody did some adding and subtracting, but whether these books came upon them, these plagues came upon them or not, I don't know.

But the point is, the exhortation is not to change what God has said, not to do any altering. Verse 20, he who testifies to these things says, surely I'm coming quickly. Amen.

Even so, come Lord Jesus, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. And thus ends the book of Revelation.

I think we've gotten something of a grasp of what its contents are about. There are still some things unsolved that you may spend as much of the rest of your life as you wish exploring, but this is all the time we have to explore together.